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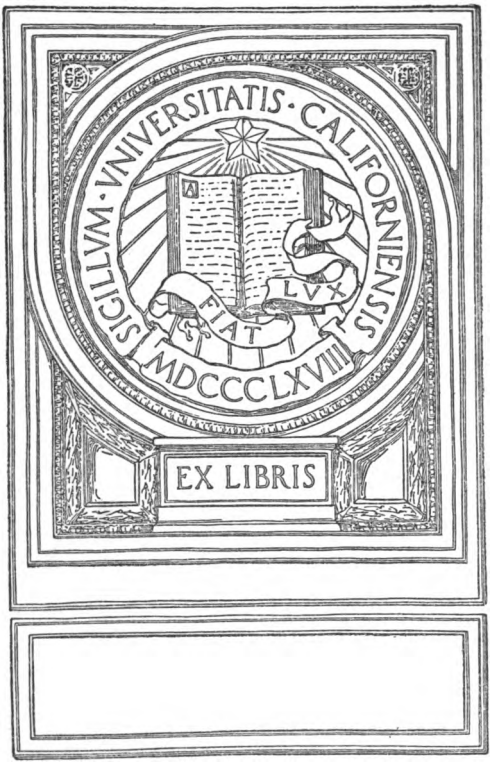

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RECOLLECTIONS OF A PRISONER OF WAR

BY

LORD PHILLIMORE, M.C.

Late Captain Highland Light Infantry

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

LONDON

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TO

MY COMRADES

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PREFACE

THERE are one or two things I should like to say about this book.

It was written not long after the War, when "Huns" were "Huns," and above all, when Britons neither apologized for being Britons nor for occupying that place in the world which the character and efforts of generations of their forerunners had achieved and to maintain which they were more than willing to contribute their own lives.

It was not written round the theme that "War is Hell on Earth."

On the contrary I hope that this truthful record of one of the by-products of War will show how far human kindness and courage in most depressing circumstances are brought out by the great appeal of a great war to the generous instincts hidden in peace.

This book also contains for me an absurd analogy to the War.

Few things can be more grim in prospect than the actual labour of compiling a book of three hundred pages. In practice the fact that this book was written with my wife at my side and behind my pen has made it one of the principal pleasures of my life since the War.

My thanks are due to Mr. Leo Maxse for permission to reprint portions of this narrative which have appeared in the *National Review*.

P.

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RECOLLECTIONS OF A PRISONER OF WAR

CHAPTER I

"FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER!"

In the enormous tunnel the Germans had constructed behind their lines, the Major in command of the battalion was cosily ensconced. Someone gave me a chair and I sat down.

He asked me who I was and I gave him my name and the name of my regiment, which did not happen to be the regiment I was attached to at that time, but which was on my identity disc.

He talked to me in French. He said:

"Nous avons été dix-huit mois dans ce secteur."

I said. "Vous vous êtes construit un bien beau tunnel."

He looked round him with pride and began boasting about the immunity its shelter provided.

"Nous n'avons eu que neuf ou dix blessés depuis plus d'un an," he assured me.

Later on, when I was taken out of the tunnel, we passed through a small cemetery near the entrance and I saw that the dates on most of the graves bore out what he said.

The interview must have lasted some time, as I was captured at about four in the morning and it was

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beginning to be light when I was taken out of the tunnel.

"You will have some companions in misfortune to-morrow," he remarked as he dismissed me.

I suppose I looked inquiringly at him. Anyhow he condescended to an explanation.

"We are going to raid your trenches to-morrow," he told me. Then by way of consolation he added: "For you, at all events, the war is over."

He could not have hit on anything better calculated to infuriate a prisoner, but I think he really intended it as kindness.

Yes, the war was over for me, in the sense he meant. But strangely enough it was not a cheering thought.

Outside the tunnel I was taken to a hut where a doctor dressed my slight wounds. He talked a great deal, and tried to get information out of me. After a bit I was fetched by a very smart staff officer in a limousine. We went off at a terrific pace along a road which was exposed to direct gunfire from the British. However, it was screened by a wall of hop-poles, placed side by side so close together as to form an opaque wall. There was hardly a shell-hole on the road and Germans were ploughing the land a very little way from the screen. All the land was under cultivation and everything was as tidy as if they meant to stay there for ever.

The staff officer talked a good deal, trying to get some news out of me. He gave it up after a time, remarking encouragingly: "Für Ihnen der Krieg ist fertig," and relapsed into silence.

We came to Bapaume, which was Divisional H.Q. There I was taken into a big room where a dozen or

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so weedy-looking soldiers were constructing and copying maps of the near-by sectors. I was very much flabbergasted to see a map which showed the position of each battalion on our side, and, so far as I could judge, showed it accurately.

An intelligence officer sat at a table at the end of the room and I was given a chair opposite him. "I am managing director of the second largest ironworks in Germany," he began in a very civil tone, at the same time pushing a box of biscuits across the table. "Will you not have a biscuit?"

He seemed divided in his mind as to whether his best plan for extracting information from me was to impress me with his importance or beguile me with his kindness. He succeeded in being thoroughly patronizing.

I took a biscuit.

"Biscuits are great luxuries nowadays," he said with something like a sigh as he watched it disappear. "But for you at all events the war is over. Will you have a cigarette?" he went on, and pushed over a box of cigarettes.

I thanked him and took one.

After a lot of direct questions, he tried to excite me by alluding to the causes of the war. I was quite ready to discuss this at length. I was only too glad to sit still, as my wound made me a bit weak and faint and I was also anxious to empty his valuable box of biscuits, as I thought not only that it would be a long time before I saw another, but that it was pleasing to see how he hated my eating them.

Outside the window I noticed a huge shell planted point upwards in the garden as a kind of ornament. He saw me looking at it and said:

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"That is one of your shells which fell in the garden and failed to explode."

It was pretty sickening to think that the wretched thing had got so near to sending him and the whole H.Q. up and had then bungled it at the last minute by not exploding. I took another biscuit and tried to get him to talk about his ironworks at Düsseldorf, but he did not in the least want to talk about his ironworks at Düsseldorf. They had served their purpose when they were used to impress me, and he was not to be turned away from carrying on his catechism.

From time to time he went away and did a little writing at another table, but he always came back and tackled me again. He was a persevering and a very able man. Indeed, during the whole time I was in Germany I did not see another who struck me as being so capable.

"Tell me," he said, returning from one of these excursions to the other side of the room. "Have you been well treated since you were taken prisoner?"

"Quite well," I said. "I've nothing to complain of, thanks."

"Well then," he interposed quickly, "why do you all accuse us of being barbarians? You see it is not true."

This, as I afterwards noticed, was one of the things they always said. They were very sore at being called Huns and Vandals by the Allies.

I said: "I see you know how to behave as officers and gentlemen. That is one of the reasons why we are so surprised that you should make war on women and children in the way you do."

He became purple in the face, and I helped myself to another cigarette.

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Off and on he talked for two or three hours, and when he had finished I had completed a very satisfying meal and the biscuit-box was three parts empty.

At last he sent me away and I was taken upstairs to the General. The General was a very smart, clean-bred-looking sort of fellow. From his appearance I did not think it would be at all safe to try pulling his leg. He began asking me some question or other, so I said to him:

"Sir, you are a soldier and know that I am not at liberty to answer your questions."

He looked at me and smiled. "Very well," he said. "Good-day." And he shook hands.

I was then turned over to another intelligence officer, who asked me quantities of questions all apparently with the object of finding out which was my unit and what part of the line it occupied. My captors had made the mistake of thinking that because my identity disc showed that I belonged to the Highland Light Infantry, that regiment must be in the trenches opposite where I was taken, instead of the South Wales Borderers, which they thought were there, and which were in fact there. I found out their illusion while I was still in the tunnel, and of course I encouraged this idea. I saw by the maps in the room downstairs that the South Wales Borderers were put down as occupying the position they actually were in, but for a long time the possibility of my being attached to that regiment did not seem to strike anyone. The intelligence officer, however, after questioning me for some time, suddenly produced a book from behind his back and handed it to me, saying:

"Well, you may have seen this before."

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It was the pay-book of the man who had been killed beside me when I was wounded. In it was my own signature staring me in the face.

I was furious, as I quite thought I had put them on a wrong track.

Up to this point the Germans had come out with credit. Perhaps now they thought there was nothing more to be got out of me by keeping up a pretence of civility.

I was sent to St. Quentin by train and was then marched to the gaol, which was being used both for military and civilian prisoners. On the way through the streets the French behaved in a very kind and plucky manner, some of them trying to edge up near me and murmuring sympathetic phrases, others shouting to me from the opposite side of the road such words of encouragement as "Vivent les Alliés!" or "Pauvre ami!" in spite of curses and threats from my escort. I remember one woman in particular whom we met coming along the pavement towards us. She was dressed in deep mourning and took no special notice of me, but to let us go by edged to one side of the pavement without actually leaving it for the road. In obedience to an order given by the N.C.O. in charge of my escort, the poor woman was pushed and hustled into the road to the accompaniment of shouts and execrations yelled at her by the escort. It was the first exhibition I had seen of Hun methods. . . .

My cell opened off a stone corridor. It was as bare as my hand except for a palliasse bed and the most disgusting and rudimentary sanitary apparatus. There was a window high in the wall, but of course I could not see out of it.

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In that cell, time stood still. At intervals, when it was dark, a guard came and flashed a lantern at me through a hole in the door, peering behind it to see if I was still there. After a while I found in the straw of my bed a piece of a book. There was only a bit of it and it was in French. O Lord, what a godsend it was!

The sentries were Prussian Guards who had fought at Ypres and been wounded there. There also they had acquired a wholesome respect for us which they displayed in various useful ways, such as singing songs at my request, which provided a diversion.

Some time after I was shut up, another British officer named Crossland was brought in and put in the cell next to mine. The guard, however, used to allow him to come into my cell. He had a nasty wound in the arm, and had, like me, been taken on patrol.

Two German officers came to visit me. The first of them said he was sorry for me as he had a brother a prisoner in England in a camp near Slough. I was anxious to get word home to my people that I was alive, as I knew I should be reported killed before this time; and my visitor offered to get a postcard through to England if I liked to write. I was delighted, not to say grateful, and I quickly wrote one and gave it to him.

"If you want any money," he said then, "I shall be pleased to lend you some."

I hesitated over this, as I didn't like to borrow money from a German; but finally I accepted a pound and agreed with him that I should have it paid back to his brother at Slough. Not to be outdone by a Hun, I said, when we had fixed this arrangement:

"Isn't there anything I can do for your brother?"

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He thanked me and thought for a moment.

"My brother is always glad of books," he said at last. "He is much interested in geology. If you could arrange that a book on the geological formation of the district he is in should be sent to him, he would much appreciate it."

I promised to do this, and eventually, through my writing home, it was done; and the prisoners who escaped from Slough no doubt held the book open in one hand as they dug their way out.

I had had no time since the war began to think of escapes, or of prisoners, or of anything concerning that side of fighting, and my visitor could not have hit on anyone who would more innocently have fallen in with his plans. I am convinced, however, that he thought of it on the spur of the moment, and I record the trap he laid for me not only as a distinct score for the Germans but as the only instance I personally ever observed, in any of them, of resource and presence of mind. As a rule it took them ages to think out the simplest device.

After he had gone another man came to see me. He did not seem to be of the officer class, but did his best to impress me. He said:

"I lived in London for years before the war. I knew all the important people there."

Thereupon he reeled off a lot of names, some of which I recognized as those of former Lord Mayors and judges. He added that he was in England when the war broke out.

"I suppose you had no trouble in getting away?" I asked him.

"No," he said. "I got away quite easily. No thanks

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to the people at our Consulate, though; they were very stupid about it, I thought. If it hadn't been for the Austrian Consulate I might have had great difficulty."

"How did they help you?"

"Oh," he replied, "they had a ship ready and waiting."

When I had been there a day or two, I was allowed to go out into the prison yard for a short time for exercise. The prison was shaped like a star, with narrow yards between the points. In my yard there were half a dozen very seedy-looking civilians. I at once began to talk to them, as far as I could do so without attracting too much attention from the sentries. We all wandered about and when I came near anyone I made some excuse, such as stooping to tie my bootlace, to pause long enough to exchange a few words.

One of the prisoners I found to be a deserter from the German Army, an Alsatian. He went in fear of his life, as he expected to be shot at any moment. He had hidden with some French people but was caught.

I asked another, an old, old man who was so infirm he could only totter, why he had been put in prison.

"It was because, to feed my rabbits, I gathered dandelions without permission," he told me.

Another, a priest, was in prison for having buried his money and refusing to tell the Germans where it was.

Soon after that I was sent to the Commandant's office. There I found a very pretty Frenchwoman, chatting with the Commandant. She was smartly dressed with all the *chic* peculiar to her race, and she had large hazel eyes with which she freely helped out

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her conversation with the Commandant. When I came in he made a sort of introductory gesture:

"Madame is kind enough to interest herself in the prisoners," he said.

I bowed, and the lady hazarded a vague expression of sympathy. Evidently this sort of interview had occurred pretty often before, and she knew just what she would be allowed to say. She asked me if I had any money. "I have a little, but I try to keep that for the privates," she explained.

I had the pound I had borrowed, and told her so.

"If you like me to buy you anything with it," she said, "I will gladly do so."

I gave her five francs, and she bought me several things: a tooth-brush and tooth paste, a comb and a piece of soap.

A day later about twenty men and a sergeant of the South Wales Borderers were brought in. They had been captured in a raid, as the German in the tunnel had told me would happen. They gave me a fearful account of the raid; It was carried out by means of a barrage of the kind later familiar as the Box Barrage.

In company with this score of men Crossland and I were packed off to Germany. After leaving St. Quentin I was never able to speak to the men again.

Our escort was a Death's Head Hussar officer, and he and a corporal travelled in the same carriage as we two Englishmen. It was a third-class carriage, and we were a good deal surprised at a German officer condescending to use it.

The Death's Head lit a cigar. The corporal lit a cigarette; first, however, attending to the duty which seemed to be the cause of his accompanying us. This

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was the care of the officer's busby, which he removed from his head and handed to the N.C.O., who took it reverently as if it were a mixture between dynamite and eggshells, and balanced it with the most extreme precautions on the rack. Seeing them both smoking, I produced a cigarette and lighted it. I had taken about two puffs when there was a loud German bark from the officer's corner. I did not pay any attention to it, as it was in German and I was not supposed to know that language, so he repeated it in French.

"Prisoners are not allowed to smoke."

I felt argumentative, and I thought it was really very odd that the corporal, without asking leave, should smoke in the railway carriage with his officer, so I said:

"I shouldn't have lit up if I had not seen your corporal smoking."

At this the German turned all the colours of the rainbow.

"I must remind you," he shouted, "of the case of the Baralong."

I had never heard of the Baralong.

"What is a baralong?" said I. "I don't understand German."

He began a long disquisition in German, and I did not understand a word except that it was something about shooting. At last he talked himself to a standstill.

Next morning we arrived at Cologne, and were put into the place where they usually kept the lamps in a subway under the line.

The Death's Head Hussar was greeted by a fair young maiden who fell upon his neck, and we parted

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without mutual regret, and I think I may add, without mutual esteem.

The lamp house was scrawled all over with the names of prisoners who had been there before us. After we had kicked our heels in it for some hours a Feldwebel Leutnant appeared and told us to come along. He was a fat and a comparatively amiable old man. We asked him where we were going.

"To Gütersloh," he answered. "To Gütersloh, where there is the best *schinken* in Westphalia." He smacked his lips at the thought.

I was to spend the next eleven months in the camp at Gütersloh, but I never so much as smelt that *schinken*.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH I ENLARGE MY ACQUAINTANCE

ARRIVING at Gütersloh was just like arriving for the first time at a public school. The old-established prisoners treated the wretched last comers as if it were an impertinence on their part to exist, let alone to draw the attention of the select tenants of Block D to their deplorable existence. I arrived there feeling as miserable, as ill, as depressed, as the majority of new-comers to that place of ill-memory; but unconsciously at the sight of it I felt momentarily cheered. Here, I imagined, I should at least be among friends; here I should find the sympathy of those whose woes were as mine, the fellow-feeling born of knowledge of misfortune in common. These men had been through much of what I

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had been through during the last week. How many years of acquaintance would it take to gain so much insight into another fellow's feelings as the sharing of such experiences must produce? But if I expected any hearty welcome from those who had preceded me, I was badly mistaken. I was treated exactly like a new boy. That is to say I was entirely ignored for the most part, and snubbed when ignoring was impossible. I soon found that all new arrivals were exposed to the same treatment, and as time went on I probably came to assume the same superior attitude towards still later arrivals.

One result of this behaviour on the part of his own countrymen was that an Englishman's first acquaintances were generally foreigners. One of these was a Russian, named Kronavaloff, but known to the camp as Jimmy, who soon picked up Crossland. He did this, I think not, without an eye to future parcels. In this way he was rather exceptional, for as a rule the Russians were not at all greedy. He was a tall, sleek man, dressed in a smart blue uniform; one could imagine him the Blood of some provincial town. He talked volubly in fluent English learnt from phrase-books, which produced rather odd effects. An oily sort of speech, his was, in which "please" occurred in every second sentence. He did the honours of the camp, much as an old man expecting a tip shows you round a church. He retailed all the gossip, and told Crossland and me about all the attempts to escape, and so on. I think the Allied prisoners acquired a kind of social prestige by making friends with the British. It was another effect of that exclusiveness which converted us new-comers into new boys when we turned up there. I myself rather avoided the Russians, partly

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because you never knew when they were going to kiss you loudly on both cheeks. They were taken that way whenever their emotions were in the least stirred. Nothing would induce me to admit in cold print that I had been kissed by a Russian. If the reader draws horrid conclusions from these morbid fears of mine it is the reader's unpleasant character that is to blame. He shall have no evidence from me to support his hasty judgment.

Our final departure from Gütersloh was made hideous by the fact that, laden as we were with as many of our accumulated belongings as we could carry, with every finger hooked into the handle of a suit-case, a basket, or a parcel of some sort, we were completely exposed to the demonstrations of the grieving friends we left behind us.

"Forward! March!" shouted the Hun officer. But his commands were drowned by the chorus of resounding smacks distributed upon our defenceless faces, as every Russian sprang forward and folded his victim in his arms.

One British officer early determined, being a man of great courage, to battle with the Russian language till he mastered it, and he did so with conspicuous success. He threw himself into the enterprise so wholeheartedly that he used to join the Russian drinking parties, and those were so frequent as to be to all intents and purposes continuous. I fancy that he learnt to endure the embraces of his companions without furtively wiping his cheeks with his handkerchief. But he was the only Englishman who did. I am glad to say my own Russian friend showed a commendable self-restraint in these respects.

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There was another kind of Russian who terrified me—the Russian of the intellectual sort who knew all about England. They never had read any English books except those of Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. These they firmly believed to provide an all-embracing picture of everything that goes to make up our Empire. That the authors in question should be read for the amusement they afforded did not enter the heads of the Russians. They saw nothing amusing about either of them. I myself feel doubtful if Shaw translated into Russian would move me to laughter. I fancy it is a language ill-suited to our form of humour, which is notoriously an obscure one to the foreign mind, even if it flows through the pen of an Internationalist. Why by-the-bye, do not our Internationalist littérateurs write in Esperanto?

If anyone got a little extra food he was rather apt to give a dinner-party. A certain Sokoloff was always begging me to go to one of these entertainments, and at last after a great deal of urging I did go. The conversation there turned on his experiences in the war, and he related how he was captured near Tilsit.

"I couldn't make the German Letts understand what I wanted," he told me. "At last I said to them in Latin, 'I need the doctor.' "

He pronounced the Latin in the customary continental manner, very differently from the English way, and on hearing it my face must have been a blank. This was unlucky, as they had invited me under some vague impression that I was an intellectual like themselves. Russians could never get over the contradiction between the position of England at the head of the world's civilization and the ignorance of the average

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Englishman of the literature and thought of all civilization, that of his own country not excepted. Sokoloff looked at me dubiously and said, emphasizing his remarks by brandishing his glass of chemically-made hock:

"We look to England as the source of progress. We must apply Western ideas in Russia. It is our only hope." He was very much in earnest. "Which of your modern English poets most influences your democracy?" he continued.

"Our democracy doesn't read modern poets," I suggested.

"On the contrary," he said firmly, "it is to democracy that poets make their greatest appeal. I am a poet. I am speaking of what I know!"

I felt a bit sceptical, and perhaps looked it.

"Have your poems been published?" I asked.

Sokoloff turned with a look of horror to a pal of his who sat on his other side.

"Please! You hear that, Dimitri!" he cried, throwing out his hands; "he wants to know if my poems are published! Tell him! Tell him!"

"Oh, yes," Dimitri responded to this passionate appeal. "Mr. Kronavaloff he publish poems. Several hundreds of books he sell in Moscow."

Sokoloff turned back to me with a triumphant air, and pursued his advantage by demanding: "And the works of Pushkin—have they not influenced you? I suppose with them, at least, you are well acquainted?"

I certainly knew this writer by name, but I felt that that only made matters worse. I could not somehow quite believe that Sokoloff had produced anything

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particularly worth reading, but I knew I ought to have read Pushkin.

Sokoloff continued to rain upon me the names of unfamiliar poets, and soon proved to the entire satisfaction of himself and his friends that the English democracy exist mainly on a diet of modern poetry.

The dinner ended in my very complete discomfiture. It, no doubt, was a very successful evening from my entertainer's point of view. He showed me that it was not every Russian who was going to accept the position of being two hundred years behind the West.

Afterwards I asked one of his brother-officers about Sokoloff.

"Do you mean the poet?" he asked.

"That's the fellow," said I. "Do you know anything about him?"

"Yes. Sokoloff was a kind of newspaper man, rushing about from one part of Moscow to another where one had stolen a handkerchief or where there was a fire."

"What sort of poetry does he write?" I asked.

"Oh, very modern! The sort that no one can understand," was the answer.

Not all my association with the Russians was on this high literary plane. I remember that about one hundred or more officers were captured during Brusilov's successful offensive in 1916, and sent to Gütersloh. They represented the new Army raised by the Russians after their enormous losses of 1914 and 1915, when, having left behind them in Prussia and Poland practically all their arms and most of their trained men, they started to create entirely new forces much as we did at the beginning of the war.

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This new Russian Army was recruited from further afield than the old regular Army. It contained men from Mussulman tribes brought out of the wilds of Asia and the Caucasus. An Englishman I later met in prison told me he had visited the part of South Russia somewhere up behind the Sea of Azov during the Russo-Japanese War, and the peasants in that district did not know that there was a war going on. The officers were taken from a humbler stratum of society than had previously been worked, and the experiment had so far been very successful. On a front of 500 miles their advance had been about a hundred miles. The old originals of the Russian Army, however, whom they found at Gütersloh, were unable apparently to understand that an army could exist in which they themselves did not figure. At all events the reception accorded to us as New Boys, by our regulars who had been taken at the beginning of the war, was an enthusiastic one compared to the way in which these officers of Brusilov's Army were received by the already established Russian prisoners. They simply had nothing to do with them at all. For that matter, none of the prisoners of the Allied nations hung together as the British did.

One way and another some of us thought a good dinner would do no harm to these half-starved newcomers, and we set to work to organize one.

The principal difficulty was that none of them could speak any language but their own. This applied to a great number of their hosts also. Every available interpreter was roped in, but in spite of that the conversation was chiefly carried on by knife, fork and spoon. The Germans used to make a most horrible form of

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bread, almost entirely composed of string and bark, or goodness knows what, and always sour. A plate of this stuff was habitually put down at intervals on the tables in front of the officers, who all had their meals at the same time and in the same hut. No pampered Briton after his parcels once began to arrive ever touched this concoction of sawdust or whatever it was, so that the piles of it were left uneaten at the end of every meal. When these new Russians arrived, the poor devils took to coming round just as we were finishing and begged us to give them these remains, or even any crusts which were left. It can be imagined the feelings with which they saw the various dishes of the appetizing menu we were able to place before them.

Reduced to silence and the handing of plates, I had plenty of time to consider my guests and to wonder what they would have told me if we had been able to converse. For the most part they were a wild and shaggy-looking lot, and I was surprised by the neatness with which one of the shaggiest capped my little set speech of congratulation, translated and delivered for me by a Russian friend of the old Army, in which I recapitulated the successive points they had captured in their offensive.

"If we had known what an interest Captain Phillimore took in our progress," he remarked politely, "we would have advanced at least another one hundred miles."

They were all much surprised to find that we knew anything about their achievements.

My neighbour on my right was a small and very neat man, a great contrast to the others. He had an educated expression that sat oddly on his round and

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childlike face. He looked, too, as if he had led an indoor life, while the others did not. His solitary contribution to the evening's merriment was to tell me (through an interpreter) that his father was a lawyer in Kieff. What had been his own occupation, I wondered, and what were to-night his thoughts and memories?

My other neighbour was of a very different type. I thought that if I had met him chopping wood in the forest I should probably have seen him where he felt most at home.

It was pleasant to listen to our guests' gratitude for this repast, but the dinner led to nothing much in the way of social relations between them and us. In some mysterious way that band of officers seemed to sink into the recesses of the camp and never to emerge again. At all events we saw no more of them.

A rank was held among these new Russian troops that corresponded very closely to a strictly unofficial one in use in ours; i.e. *Prapochik*, which means War-Lieutenant.

Mitrofan Soimenow was one of the Russians first installed as a prisoner of war, a young officer in the Marine Infantry, the first and oldest line regiment in the Russian Army. He was one of a family of soldiers, which was ennobled by Peter the Great for building the fleet with which the Turks were defeated.

Through him I made the acquaintance of another Russian.

Soimenow said to me one day: "Would you like to know Tafinzoff? He has just been let out of cells."

Prapochik Tafinzoff was a promoted N.C.O. who had been given a commission for gallantry. He had

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previously been awarded the Georgia Cross, which is equivalent to our Victoria Cross.

"He got out of the camp with two other men," Soimenow went on. "They actually crossed a bridge which led into Holland. They were safely across the frontier, but they did not know it. So when a German sentry challenged them from the German end, they came back and were re-arrested."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said I.

"I believe he's thinking of trying once more," Soimenow said. "He might take you."

"Why on earth should he want to take me?" I asked.

Soimenow looked at me extremely earnestly and evaded the question. He was always very benevolently inclined towards me, and he stuck to his opinion.

"All the same I think he might," he said.

That evening Tafinzoff and I were introduced to each other in Soimenow's room. He was a good-natured looking, sturdily built, smart N.C.O., the sort of man who would have done credit to any army. A very good fellow I should think he was. He looked very pale and drawn as a result of his close confinement, and I was favourably impressed by his prudence when he said:

"I think I ought to have another fortnight to get strong in before starting."

But I could see he was mad keen to go and I felt sure he would have a try whether I went or not. The initial difficulty was that he spoke no word of anything but Russian, and I didn't know one word of that tongue. Soimenow, however, was reassuring on that point.

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"That will be quite easy," he said. "The Russian for 'good' is *horosho*. If you want to go one way, you will point and say '*horosho*.' If he doesn't want to go that way he will shake his head, or perhaps say '*Nix horosho*.' "

In this way, in one lesson, did I learn the Russian language.

However, as a precaution, possibly superfluous, I managed to get hold of two thumb-nail dictionaries. One was Russian-German, and the other French-Russian. If elaborate conversations became necessary they were to be conducted by these aids. Tafinzoff had no opinion at all of this dictionary plan. I dare say he could not read any words with more than four or five letters in them.

Tafinzoff's scheme was to knock a hole in the wall of a cellar under the house the Russians were in, or rather just under the room in that house occupied by the German guard. Through this hole he hoped to get into a drain, which he again hoped might be big enough to crawl along to a point outside the wire fence where there was a man-hole. Arrived there, he intended to chip away the cement and bricks round the iron cover of the man-hole, while friends signalled to him from the cellar that the sentry was at the far end of his beat. When the cover was chipped loose he hoped to prise it up before the sentry turned. There might then, he hoped, be time to climb out and run into the cover of the trees that grew up to within twenty yards of the wire.

Hope seemed to form rather an unduly large part of this plan. I spent a baddish night or two over it, especially as shortly before this the Germans had made

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a particular point of jabbing a Russian in the head as he was emerging from his pet hole, which was the end of a burrowed tunnel. He was, of course, absolutely defenceless, being jammed tightly in the mouth of the hole, but they practically cut his head to pieces. By some miracle he did not die.

Still, as Tafinzoff was taking all the trouble and knew the way to the frontier I thought it was too good a thing to miss.

Fortunately, however, I did miss it.

All went well for some days, and considerable progress was made with breaking down the wall in the cellar. But Tafinzoff was red-hot with impatience, and insisted on going on digging at all hours, irrespective of safety. One fine morning another Russian came to me and said:

"Tafinzoff would not leave off digging when the German guard came back from his dinner. Of course, it was hopeless to keep on like that just under the guard's toes. Now the whole thing has been discovered and he has been sent back to his cell."

So that was the end of that.

Another Russian was soon introduced to me. He was a very furtive little man, Liontieff by name, with the pale appearance and intellectual forehead of a student. He was a very earnest little man, as all the Russians were when sober. He was reported to have special knowledge with regard to a mysterious passage which ran under the camp carrying the electric wires of the lighting installation. We met under some pine-trees in a more or less secluded part of the camp.

He hemmed and hawed a lot about telling me his plan, and in the end it turned out that his reluctance

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was due to his wanting to ask me for some money to give to a German. This was the first and only time I tried bribery and corruption.

He said: "I hate having to ask you for the money, but I shall pay you back if my plan does not succeed. For the past year or more I have been in close touch with the German caterer. That man keeps the keys of the passage. It can be entered below the kitchen and emerges in the power station beyond the wire."

"That's very interesting," I said.

"He is a very money-grubbing man," the Russian continued; "he would do anything for money. Also he has a brother-in-law at Ahlen, between here and the frontier. This brother-in-law has a motor-car."

"That's even more interesting," said I.

"As soon as he can arrange with his brother-in-law to borrow the motor, and can himself get a day's leave," my new friend went on, "the brother-in-law will bring the motor to a place about two miles from the camp. My German will let us out through the secret passage, and will himself come with us into Holland. He does not mean to return."

"Are you sure he is to be trusted?" I inquired.

"I know all about his family history," he replied. "This money is to keep his wife till the end of the war, while he deserts into Holland."

He never more than half convinced me that the German would not let him down, but I lent him a small sum from time to time, and I was much touched later, when I had moved to another camp, by receiving payment of the greater part of this. He had already run through all his own money during the last year; the German had continually put him off from day to day

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while Liontieff gradually paid over to him his entire resources. In the end Von Groeben, the Commandant, sent for him one morning and said:

"It will be better for your health and the camp if you leave it."

And he left it.

So far without scaith to my skin or to my reputation with the Huns, and with no greater expense than the loan of a little money, I had managed to have considerable thrills.

The Russians had something very likeable about them. I think it was their disregard for material as compared with spiritual things. This was odd, as they were so excessively fond of drink. But they were not greedy; in fact, they were so proud that we found it very hard, if not impossible, to get them to accept food, unless they were absolutely starving. At Christmas-time in 1916 each British officer contributed a tin of something eatable to a store of provisions we meant to present to the Russians as a Christmas present. To our annoyance they refused to accept it. We finally hit on the expedient of holding a sale of this accumulation of supplies, which we priced at nominal prices. This was fairly successful; a good many of them bought the things, but even then some of them would have nothing to do with it.

With their absence of materialism there seemed to be coupled a certain childishness. Many prisoners who gazed on the barbed wire longed to fly over it. None but the Russians ever thought they actually would do so. They collected endless bits of paper and most ingeniously, Heaven knows how, made a kind of dope. Piece by piece they stuck their old envelopes and

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parcel-wrapping together, until gradually a vast balloon took shape. One sleeping-room was filled; the balloon squeezed through the door and gradually filled a second; amidst delirious excitement a third room was reached, and the end of the Zeppelin filled up that one. The whole thing was nearly complete.

At this moment the Germans stepped in, and with extreme earnestness packed the beautiful fabric into sacks and took it away for the furnace of the power station.

Many of the Russians were enormously rich, and princes were as plentiful in the camp as flies.

But modesty was another characteristic much in evidence among them and sometimes contrasted painfully with the lack of it among those who should have known better—in other words, among citizens of the Empire on which the sun never sets.

Soon after I was captured another bunch of prisoners was brought in, one of them a Canadian who bore the good old British name of Stein, and he was put into the room I shared with half a dozen other Englishmen. He was a boastful, swaggering vulgarian and the source of a great deal of irritation to us. He would boast about any and everything and spent half the day telling us how much better things were done in Canada and how inferior we all were to Canadians; and in general holding forth in that tone. At first some of us were rather taken in by him, especially as he was always talking of escaping. He wasn't going to stay and rot at Gütersloh! He would be out of it before many more days. He would like to see the camp that could hold him! And so on.

In consequence of this sort of talk he was at first

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taken at the value he set upon himself. We imagined him to be an extra stout fellow and he was admitted into a tunnelling scheme. But before long we found out that he was quite unreliable and his help was dispensed with. He was nothing but a windbag.

After a time he drifted into the company of certain Russians, who put up with him in consideration of his having plenty of money and a large capacity for liquor.

Beside the general dining hall was another, where by paying extra you were allowed to have your own food cooked by the orderlies and served at small tables. This was also used as a drinking lounge between meals, and at almost any time of day you could find a select coterie of Russians drinking there. To them Stein attached himself, and there on a certain afternoon when he was sitting in this place playing cards with a man named Kropotoff he was overheard in the midst of one of his frequent dissertations on the glories of Canada. Several Russians sitting around were listening very politely, if without much interest.

"We don't have any of these potty little European farms out my way," Stein was assuring them. "None of these little 200-acre plots where I come from! My father farms 2,500 acres, and I have a brother who had a ranch of 20,000 acres with 40,000 head of cattle on it."

"Indeed," his *vis-à-vis* replied mildly. "And how much in square versts is 20,000 acres?"

He was an inconspicuous-looking man with a large nose.

"Sure I don't know," Stein said indifferently.

But a willing interpreter chimed in from a neigh-

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bouring table, and—with a chuckle of joy, told Kropotoff what was the Russian equivalent to an acre.

"Is that so?" Kropotoff said slowly, taking another sip from his glass. "Well, my agent tells me—I haven't gone into the question myself, but I dare say he knows—he tells me my land measures about a hundred miles by eighty. That would account for a good many of your ranches, hein?"

Complete and total collapse of Stein.

I only discovered years afterwards that Kropotoff, whom after this we believed to be so enormously rich, really hadn't got a *sou*, but was merely a very superior bluffer to Stein.

640 acres = 1 sq. mile 80 × 100 sq. mi. = 8000 sq. mi. =

CHAPTER III

COMMANDANT VON GROEBEN

In view of what has happened since, it is interesting to remember that before I left Gütersloh I became convinced that the word had gone round to commandants of Gefangenenläger to make up, to some extent, to the Russian prisoners. Von Groeben, the Commandant at Gütersloh, was a Prussian of the Prussians. A Junker, with large estates in East Prussia, he had served in the Franco-German War of 1870, and was a typical specimen of the German officer of the regular Army. Yet in spite of the fact that his estates lay in the track of the first Russian advance, and had been sacked and looted during that advance, he was more lenient to the Russians than to others.

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At first this may have been due to his direct experience of Russian power. It may have had the effect on him which the Germans always expected frightfulness to have on their foes.

He ruled the camp with an iron rod, but he ruled his own men in the same way and did not encourage insolence from them towards the prisoners. He left us alone as much as he could, and on the whole he seemed to regard us with contempt and to be above the spite that leads to active persecution. The Prussian officer of 1870 must have been a cut above the 1914 product.

He had his weak points. If you walk about the West End, you will from time to time as you pass the windows of venerated and highly conservative clubs catch glimpses of elderly gentlemen of bristly demeanour, glaring out at you over the open pages of their newspapers. Possibly you wonder vaguely who they may be who look out so fiercely on the life that streams by below them, and you may imagine them passing their later years in some haunt of retired veterans. If you are fancifully disposed, you very likely form a mental picture of them as they may look at home, sitting opposite their rather timid, tired-looking wives, brandishing the newspaper at them over the breakfast table. You think you can hear them snarling indignantly as they read out paragraphs that especially outrage their prejudices, and snapping off the head of anyone who ventures to differ from them.

Von Groeben always reminded me of this type of elderly warrior. I am sure that for years he had terrorized his household, and that his wife trembled before his lightest word, or I should rather say before his

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most gentle snort. For years he must have inveighed against England and English machinations, against his own Government, and against the hard fate that prevented him from taking a hand and putting everything to rights. And then, O unhoped-for bliss! came the war, and the shortage of officers; and behold him suddenly and ecstatically transferred from his irksome retirement to the important and responsible post of Commandant of a Gefangenenläger; to a position of great power and authority; from obscurity to brilliant light.

Here at Gütersloh he found in the prisoners a splendid audience—attentive to his remarks even as his wife had been, subdued even as she, and still less likely than she to give him anything disconcerting in the way of back-chat. An audience to whom it probably was, if anything, more easy to speak his entire mind, for at the last resort Frau Von Groeben might perhaps be goaded into forgetting temporarily what he preferred for dinner, or into some such low and un-Christian method of asserting herself.

He would march up to morning *Appell*, very smart, very correct; saluting the prisoners in the German way, which was to walk along the whole line with his head sharply canted to the left and his hand up to his cap, and to lower it only at the end of the line. The parade meanwhile has to stand at the salute the whole time, the effect being rather spoilt when those in the front rank have only about one brace-button between them. The Commandant would receive the salute with half an eye, keeping the other and harsher half for old Major Robinson, who was probably

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doubling up, buttoning his tunic as he ran. Having lifted his eye off the Major he would halt in front of the senior British officer and bark out:

"Noch ein Deutscher Sieg!"

The senior British officer would try to look as if he did not mind.

Von Groeben would then read out a communiqué, giving a huge list of casualties among the Allies, and winding up with: "Our casualties were remarkably light."

Very often there would be accounts of British ships sunk as the result of the ever increasing submarine campaign. It was on this point, though, that the prisoners got their own back on him. There came a day in February 1917 when the Kaiser's reluctant hand signed the edict authorizing the unlimited submarine warfare. At least we were all told that he wept when he signed it. Von Groeben, contrary to all the best traditions of the Prussian Army, failed in this case to show his Royal Master the sincerest form of flattery. His tears unaccountably refused to flow. With English commerce swept from the seas, at last that odious parcel-cart which staggered up from the station every week with hundreds of parcels for the British prisoners could be devoted to more German uses. For a few days our Commandant was all smiles.

About ten days later there came a morning when the parcel-cart was due. In the natural course of things we should all have been gathered in the parcel office, standing at the counter in long queues till it should please the Huns to hand us our parcels. As a matter of fact we were so gathered, when who should stroll in but Von Groeben. He had come to gloat

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over the empty shelves and our disappointment. Well he knew it would be a bitter one.

He came marching in, sword clanking, spurs jingling.

But, thousand devils, what was this? Our Commandant suddenly turned scarlet and began to gobble like a turkey.

The counter was simply groaning with parcels; they were piled so high that he could hardly see over them. Never had there been a heavier consignment. No wonder the sight was too much for Von Groeben's temper.

"But the unlimited submarine campaign has begun!" he roared, "It is impossible for English ships to cross the seas!"

A ray of hope seized him. The parcels might have been delayed in Holland and despatched from England before the campaign began. He snatched up a parcel to examine it. But no, there was the date, neatly stamped on the familiar labels of Harrods Stores, or Lady Victoria Herbert's Agency for the Relief of Prisoners. He put it down and caught up another; and another and still another, but with no better luck. At last, with one more wild protest, he turned and vanished, too soon, let us hope, to hear the suppressed titter of joy that followed him.

When, after the Somme, in the autumn of 1916, Hindenburg took over the supreme command, there was an exhaustive combing out through the length and breadth of Germany of all the "indispensables" who by hook or crook had hitherto contrived to wriggle out of joining up, or had managed to stay behind when others went to the Front, and of those who,

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when wounded, had escaped being sent out again. It was known as the Hindenburg comb, and was applied with inexorable severity. There were a lot of men in our camp who came in its track; they were porters, storekeepers, clerks in the Kommandantur; a man whose chief job it was to ferret out our secrets and lay bare our tunnels; and electricians, guards, and sentries. Each of these was terrified that his particular physical disability would no longer work as an excuse; and these dreads of theirs they used to pour out into our ears. With some of them we mildly sympathized, but the camp joined as one man in its heartfelt anxiety that at least the interpreter should not escape.

He was a large man, fat and oily. He spoke commercial English with frightful fluency. He thought himself entitled to speak to us as equals; for he seemed to believe, as apparently all Germans do believe when they have had an office for a year or two in the purlieus of an English industrial town, that he had lived there as an honoured member of the best English society.

One of his occupations was to censor the letters we received, and this drove us nearly mad. He made a point of frequently telling a friend of mine how much he enjoyed reading his mother's letters. He asserted that he had a Scotch wife in Glasgow, and it outraged our most tender feelings that he should so much as pretend that a British woman had married such a brute. We hated him.

Von Groeben was resolved not to let off one solitary man. What is more, they should go to the Front inspired with the sentiments that ought to inspire every German heart, but which sometimes fail to do

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so at these crucial moments. To carry out his patriotic determination he held a parade of the thirty or so men he had selected for the draft. They assembled just outside the barbed wire and in full view of the delighted camp.

We were able to point out individuals to each other.

"There's poor old Hans. I saw him sobbing all yesterday in the porter's lodge."

"Konrad got off, I suppose. Don't see him, anyhow."

Suddenly Von Groeben appeared. He was mounted on a thick-set cob. Precariously seated on its back he rode slowly along the dismal ranks of the draft.

He drew rein opposite Hans: poor old Hans with his nose still red with weeping.

"Your German hearts," Von Groeben began, "must be swelling beneath your field grey upon this morning! You are indeed happy men."

Loud sniff from Hans.

"I curse the fate that prevents me from drawing my German sword in defence of the Fatherland!"

A huge tug and out flashed the German sword. Off went the cob. Off also went Von Groeben.

The rest of the speech had to be continued on foot.

That there should be no anti-climax, he did continue the speech, and in even more impassioned terms.

"This sword, what use is it any longer to me? It can no more draw blood for the Fatherland."

With a great gesture he dashed the sword upon the ground. The speech came to an end.

No one picked up the sword.

What was to be done?

How could a high officer of the German Army leave the parade while his sword was lying on the sand?

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But how could a high officer of the German Army stoop to pick it up?

CHAPTER IV

WE PREPARE FOR FURTHER ENLARGEMENT

THE French prisoners, with few exceptions, had mostly been collected by the Germans at Maubeuge. They were French territorial officers, which means older classes that have ceased to be considered as part of the Reserve of the active Army. There were artists and shopkeepers; jewellers from the Rue de la Paix, and sugar manufacturers; and others whose careers made it rather surprising that they should have had to take the field. And they had hardly been in the field long enough to have shaken down to being soldiers again.

These Maubeuge people were practically civilians, but many of them were very talented civilians. They shone as teachers of painting, as actor managers, as musicians; and for the most part threw in their talents as contributions to the general welfare of the community.

There was a fellow in a French cavalry regiment, named Van Kalck, who did nothing whatever but play the 'cello. This he did all day long for eight hours or more a day, and he said himself that he'd never enjoyed anything so much in his life as being in prison. When he was at home his wife or his children were always interrupting and he never had time to practise the 'cello properly.

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The rest of the Frenchmen were for the most part taken in the defence of Verdun. They were younger men and of course had seen a lot of hard fighting. Amongst these I had several good friends, and particularly one, a certain Lieutenant André, who was my "professeur." From him I learned French, from me he learned English. He was in the Tirailleurs de Maroc, and exceedingly proud of the fact.

In appearance he was pale and studious-looking, with a straggly black beard and spectacles. An amiable and a charming man, he was no doubt a gallant soldier also, for while he was at Gütersloh a bar to the Croix de Guerre, which he had already won, was sent to him, and he was mentioned in *L'Ordre du Jour*. Still he really was also a student, and used to spend a good deal of his time writing monographs on Tazza, the key to Morocco from the Algerian side. He was very very French and I fear did not enjoy giving me lessons or receiving them from me, as I never could resist the temptation to pull his leg. He was always anxious to talk of his Moroccan experiences. I used to make him frantic by telling him that one Englishman with a shot-gun would have pacified that country in a month.

André took very keenly to hockey, which he played in an essentially French style. His shins suffered a good deal in the process, and he was generally to be seen limping about the camp as a result of his strenuous efforts.

Not all my time was spent in scraping acquaintance with my fellow-prisoners. I had other occupations, of which the most important was scheming to escape, and with this object I did a great deal of tunnelling.

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We tunnellers were very careful, however, not to draw attention by absenting ourselves an undue amount of time on that business, so that I had plenty over, which I filled up with games and the study of German; and I practised reading the Hun newspapers and translating them.

All escaping resolves itself into two parts: getting out of prison and getting out of the country. Both usually require an immense amount of preparation. At Gütersloh my experience was confined to these preparations, as I never actually got out. Before the elaborate tunnel we made there was ready, all the British prisoners were moved to Crefeld. It was in March 1917, when the German hopes of detaching Russia from the other Allies began to take shape, and we imagined their reason for moving us was to prevent our influencing the Russian prisoners.

The prisoners' camp at Gütersloh was placed well outside the town in some flat, heathery country with pine-trees dotted about it. The buildings were large blocks of a sanatorium type, for which indeed it had been designed. They were all enclosed inside a ringed fence of barbed wire. To walk the whole way round the wire meant a tramp of half a mile; in between the blocks were expanses of bare sand piled into small waves by the passing of many feet. A good rainstorm, however, and a roller, converted these into a very tolerable hockey ground.

Here and there were rather pathetic little gardens on which the prisoners lavished attentions quite disproportionate to the results obtained; in several places tennis-courts had been constructed by the same unremitting labour. The Kommandantur occupied

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a block on the perimeter. Another was given up to kitchens, etc. The rest were allotted to the officers more or less according to their nationality; the British occupying Block D.

I had been less than a month in the hands of the Hun before I began to feel that I must have a map or perish. I asked several likely people whether they could help me in this direction, and as a result someone lent me a map of sorts, which I at once set to work to copy. It was, I was told, itself a copy of a copy of a copy, and it was thought that the original had belonged to a Russian. I doubt whether the original would have acknowledged my copy as being a direct descendant if the two had been confronted. When another man and I escaped from Schwarmstedt, carrying it with us, it set us some pretty problems. For days we hunted for a place called something Geb, only to find at last that Geb. was merely an abbreviation of Gebirge.

One day, while I was sitting at this job with a screen of books propped up all around me, wearing my most insouciant air, and fondly believing I looked as though I were engaged in studying the rules and regulations of Gefangenenläger, round the door-post there entered a grin, barely heralded by two softly padding feet. This grin, which became a wider grin as its owner quickly took in my occupation—this grin was Rogers, the talented young manager of a Durham colliery. He said:

"I seem to have seen that map before."

After this, for a week or longer, he tested my serious-mindedness on the subject of escaping, and weighed my strength of purpose, very cautiously.

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Lots of young fellows talked about escaping, without much coming of it. At last, when he was satisfied, he told me of a plan formed by himself and a couple of friends; and from this egg was hatched our great tunnel scheme.

For eight months we planned and laboured. It was Rogers' brain that carved the plans into shape and his expert skill that rendered our continued operations feasible. It was by his inspiration that loose bricks were collected from all corners of the camp and fashioned in the secrecy of his room into a dummy wall, which could be carried to the point where it was intended that it should be used.

When the Germans, their suspicions aroused by the discovery of another party's hole in the same cellar, floated cement all over the floor so that our dummy bricks became fixed to it and we could not loosen them without visibly breaking the cement, it was Rogers who supervised the ingenious and ambitious move by which we contrived to regain access to the hole we had begun to make.

The construction of the stairs leading to the cellar had a certain peculiarity of which we took advantage at the outset. The six steps at the bottom were supported by a wall on their outer side, so that a dark space was formed under the stairs between the two walls. It was here that we began to dig a hole right up against the back of the bottom step, masking our efforts with the portable brick wall. The bricks were joined with plasticine joints, and looked just like the real wall at the back of the lowest steps. We went in and out of it through a sliding door, also of bricks, which slid up to let us through and down again to encounter the

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iron probe of Konrad the detective, who was continually poking about.

When this excellent arrangement was cemented up we were at our wits' end to know what to do. Various schemes, all more or less open to objection, were suggested, till I proposed that we should start again from the front, and try to make the bottom step slide back under the one next above it, so that we could get down to our hole through the opening. At first sight this seemed almost impossible, but owing to Rogers' talents it was successfully done. It took us a fortnight of painful scrape, scrape, scrape, with stolen dinner-knives, before we could loosen the stone that formed the lowest step; a still longer time elapsed before we had succeeded in fixing wooden runners beneath the stairs behind the bottom step on which that step should slide back under the others. All our work had to be masked with plasticine every time we left it, but this was done to admiration, and nothing was noticed.

At last the hour came when this work was finished, and by dint of several of us sitting on the floor at the bottom of the stairs, the foremost with his feet against the stone, and the others behind in a string with their feet against his and each other's backs, and all pushing at once, the heavy stone moved back to its appointed place, and the top of our shaft was once more disclosed.

After this one of us squeezed his way down through the narrow aperture and work on the tunnel began again.

We were only able to work at stated hours, generally when the guard, who occupied the room above, went away to his dinner. Several of the party were always posted to watch for his return or for any other sign

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of danger from the sentries who were constantly passing the window, for the cellar was really only a sort of half basement. The watcher's job was a very trying one, and a great strain which we all felt terribly. So much depended on his alertness, and there was so very little time in which to give the alarm. Even if the watcher was as prompt as lightning, there was only just time to act on his warning after receiving it.

The wear and tear of tunnelling is not confined to the watching. As the work advances and the tunnel grows longer, the air in it gets worse and worse till it is soon unfit to breathe; then all hands have to turn to to contrive some sort of ventilation. Rogers made a fan to which he fitted a wooden flue, and this we used in order to extract the bad air; but it needed a good deal of modification and improvement before it worked properly. Till it was perfected it was poor sort of fun working at the face of the tunnel.

The passage was cut about two feet by eighteen inches, and a man could just lie in it and painfully hack away the sand in front of his head into a sort of cradle. When this was full, he had to hoist his body, as best he could, high enough to push the cradle back underneath him, at the same time signalling with a string to the man at the other end, who pulled back the sand and emptied it into a sack; after which the cradle was hauled forward to be filled again as quickly as possible.

Disposing of the sand was a problem, as such masses of it accumulated. We used to carry it out in sacks that we made of any material we could get hold of, and keep it in our rooms till nightfall. As soon as it seemed safe we smuggled the bags out, hiding them

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under our Burberrys, and scattering their contents about the camp in the places where we thought it least likely they would be noticed. Before the end of the time we discovered a way of getting up into the attics, where there was a hollow space between the flooring and the ceiling of the rooms below. This was just the place to dump the sand, and ever afterwards it was used for that purpose, though before the end the ceiling over Rogers' room began to bulge so suspiciously that we had to unload it.

As the tunnel advanced it had to be shored up with wood from packing cases that had contained our parcels. The plan was to put two nearly upright pieces on a horizontal one that was placed on the ground. A fourth piece was then stretched across the top and the two supports hammered back till they were perpendicular.

Other preparations were carried on at the same time. One of the most important was the manufacture of compasses. To make one of these an old watch had to be taken to pieces, and the fly-wheel and its pin fixed in such a way as to serve as a balance for the needle. The end of a sewing needle was cut off and the part to be used in the compass magnetized by coiling round it the flexible wire from an electric light and turning on the current for a long time. We tied the coil of wire in a horizontal position and kept it in place with the aid of string. In the end the finished compass occupied the back of the watch-case from which the works had been removed, the face and hands being left where they were, so that no one would have suspected the watch of being anything but an ordinary time-teller.

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I shall not say much more about this tunnel as it was fully described in *Comrades in Captivity*, by Harvey. It is enough to say that it survived many a scare, not to mention a serious flooding at the time when the snow melted, and by the middle of March 1917 we were industriously pecking away just below the feet of the sentry and well outside the wire. Another ten yards and we should have reached that spot behind the sandy hillock and in the shadow of the fir-trees on which our longing gaze had rested for eight months. It was a bombshell when the Germans announced that in four days' time all British were to leave the camp for Crefeld.

Oh, the heated conclaves that followed on this ukase in the secret haunts of the P.T., or Pink Toe, as Humphreys had christened our secret band of conspirators. One party was for using the unfinished tunnel at all costs; another was for handing it over to the Russians to complete.

In the end "Puck" and Owen were chosen to make the forlorn attempt. Rogers and a picked band went down with them to help them off. Onslow and I were set on guard in the stone passage at the foot of the stairs amidst a pile of empty wine-bottles. The house was given up to a final orgy which swept round and by us all the night long. The German porter constantly passed us, and to avert his suspicion we finally had recourse to bottles filled with water, from which we drank by the bucketful in feigned drunkenness, an excuse which always touched the heart of the Hun.

It was a nightmare of a night. My poisoned leg never left off throbbing, and when the escape party emerged from below, filthy and ferocious at having failed to get away the top covering of sand at the

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end of the tunnel, which had not been intended to rise at that point to the surface, I was truly thankful to sink on to my bed.

The next day I had to cadge a lift to the station; my leg was too bad to walk. I think, if the Commandant had known what I had been up to all night he would have seen me further before he would have allowed me to sit in the wagonette with him.

CHAPTER V

WE STUDY THE SUBSOIL OF THE RHINE VALLEY

CREFELD was a huge barrack, occupied in peace time by a regiment of Hussars, known, I believe, as the Tanz Husaren, on account of their proclivities for female society and ballrooms; their tradition being one rather of elegance than of martial valour. It was said that the regiment originated as a consequence of complaints from the town of Crefeld, which grew louder and louder till they came to the ears of the Kaiser himself.

"We have no military society!" was the anguished groan that rose from the inhabitants.

The Kaiser's kindly heart was touched by this *cri de cœur*.

"Build me barracks," said he, "and I'll do the rest."

They built him barracks. They were magnificent, but not from an escaping prisoner's point of view; the only means of exit being either through and under the buildings themselves, or through the strongly guarded double gateway.

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Crefeld has been very much described, as seven hundred British officers were imprisoned there.

My time there was spent between tunnelling and nursing my poisoned leg, which I acquired in the first place by upsetting a bucket of scalding water over it, and subsequently by going thence to play football on a muddy and highly septic piece of ground. My leg became very bad; the German doctor took but little interest in it and I was lucky not to lose it.

As soon as I was well enough I was admitted to a tunnelling scheme on which most of the old Gütersloh gang was engaged.

Tunnels had already been tried at Crefeld, and to the casual eye it looked as if every possible means of getting into the earth unobserved had been exhausted, but advantage was ingeniously taken of the over-crowded state of the barracks to create still another opportunity. Representations had been made to the Commandant that the rooms in which the officers were herded together were insupportable for those who wished to study quietly. Could not the Offizeren Kriegs-Gefangenen be permitted to erect for themselves cubicles in the wide passages?

The Commandant was an amiable gentleman and offered no objection if the officers paid all the expenses of such erections.

The permission eventually materialized in shanties, constructed of wood, with paper walls, which were dotted about in the middle of the corridors. They were long enough to take a bed, and a bit to spare.

Mullaly of the Guides was the proud owner of a cubicle in a ground-floor passage in my block. In the room facing him were gathered together the select

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ruffians of Gütersloh, and a few reinforcements of a similar disposition.

The only difference between Mullaly's cubicle and others was one that did not meet the eye. Behind his bed-head a false wall of brown paper concealed a space of eighteen inches between it and the real wall. It was only necessary to pull out a few drawing-pins, and a flap of brown paper could be lifted to provide a means of entering this secret place.

Here the square tiles on the floor were first taken out, and then the concrete below them was broken through till the earth was reached. By the time I arrived on the scene all this had been done and the main chamber of the pit had been excavated, so I was lucky to find that difficult part of the job finished. All we now had to do was to drive a shaft under the rest of the building, under the wide road that ran along outside it, and beneath the two pavements that bordered the road, and, say, fifteen yards further into the wheatfield beyond. On the far pavement our careful guardians had their beat.

When I joined, we were already half through April and the wheat, which was growing in some of the best soil I ever saw in Germany or anywhere else, was certain to be high and thick by the end of May. It was a lovely crop, the result of a thorough good piece of farming. Across it, twenty kilometres away or even less, we could see the spires of Venlo in Holland. We had beautiful maps; the country between us and the frontier was, in part, thickly wooded; already several prisoners on their journey hither had slipped out of their trains and made their way to freedom by the route we should follow.

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We dug that shaft, through boulder gravel, at the rate of over a yard a day.

The only difficulty was to get rid of the gravel, but here, as you will see at once, was where our suit-cases came in handy. A suit-case neatly packed with boulder gravel is nearly as much as a man can carry without obviously staggering. Carry them we did, eight or ten of us, to the tune of thirty or forty a day, up to the attic roof, where we were not allowed, but to which, of course, we had gained access by means of a home-made key. Luckily we were much in the habit of shifting from one room to another, and the Huns were accustomed to see us *déménager* ourselves in that way. This accounted when necessary for such stray glimpses as they obtained of wandering suit-cases, but we saw to it by means of our relays of watchers that we were very seldom taken in the act. The whole thing was the deadliest cinch. . . .

We were never told the reason for what happened; but I fancy there were machinations other than ours going on around and among us, and on a larger scale. Perhaps with Holland so near it was scarcely to be expected that an enterprising General commanding seven hundred British officers should not dream of a break through.

Anyhow, on or about May 15, 1917, the camp was electrified to see a half battalion of unknown German Landsturm march up, double the existing sentries, and train machine-guns so as to bring a cross-fire on the whole front of the barracks.

Our vanity was rather tickled by this attention. There was nothing in the new arrangements that need interfere with those of our particular party.

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Very different was the announcement made a few days later, that the whole body of British prisoners was in two days' time to be dispatched to other camps.

Our rage knew no bounds. This was a repetition of our Gütersloh experience, but one even more galling, the odds against our pulling off the event this time being much less heavy.

Our shaft was already across the road and under the far pavement. Only a fortnight or three weeks more and our goal would have been attained.

It was absolutely maddening. The wheat would have been a yard high! No sentry would have gone into that sacred crop. It was *streng verboten* to spoil one blade of it. Unbroken it ran, a huge field, right away to the railway embankment, out of sight of the town.

Sickening. . . .

The majority of the prisoners had been over two years at Crefeld, and many of them had accumulated truckloads of luxuries—from tame rabbits to private stoves. In our room we had a cooking-stove for which I had subscribed. A small thing but perfect. It was the most perfect thing in stoves I ever saw in my life. It was the apple of our eyes, but must be left behind like most other things, as nothing might be taken beyond what we could carry with our own hands.

The entire camp was furious at the wholesale confiscation. It was particularly furious too at losing all its comforts. On the last night a wave of massed passion surged through the prisoners. It was determined that in spite of the Commandant's express orders to the contrary the tennis and squash courts that had been

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erected of wood and wire at the officers' expense should not be left intact for their enemies.

In an incredibly short space of time the uprights of the tennis courts and the wooden sides of the squash courts were torn down and set on fire. Out came the interpreter, whose silk business in New York and office in London had kept him civil beyond the ordinary till this point. Out came the Feldwebels, and the guard was turned out; but long familiarity with the prisoners had tempered the savagery of these warriors, and they were merely brushed to one side. In came a half company of the new regiment, but they also were nonplussed by the howling and ever-shifting mob and the tangled lengths of wire netting behind which we dodged. Through the darkness they chased us; flames were everywhere; in and out of their dancing light we were pursued with bayonets and execration. Why half of us were not killed I don't know, but we played well together, and not till the destruction was completed did we return, still full of vengeful mutterings, to our quarters.

CHAPTER VI

THE HEART OF THE MOORS

NEXT morning, carrying a gravelly suit-case in one hand, a roll of wraps in the other, with a pail slung over my shoulder by a bit of string, and the rest of my *batterie de cuisine* inside the pail, I staggered along the road to the station. My leg was better but not quite healed.

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The new battalion had its revenge during this painful march, for at every five yards or so some exhausted officer dropped with a groan various large packages of his household gods, and no one was allowed to fall out to recover his belongings. That mile of road must have been well worth scavenging.

The prisoners were entrained in two trains, and started for two different destinations, both undivulged.

We had no idea where we were going. We were very heavily guarded, and no semblance of a chance to escape presented itself during the journey. After a good many hours of travelling it dawned on us that we were going to pass the north of the Gütersloh region. In our carriage there was a map of the railway, lightly framed. When we were finally disembarked that map found its way into a pocket. Barring that and our old Gütersloh map which gave us the lie of the country towards the south, we had no geographical information.

A couple of hours before we came to our final and full stop, and somewhere in the region of Hanover, I noticed a broad canal drawn with a ruler across the land and running due west as far as the eye could see. I said to a friend of mine who had inhabited the same room at Gütersloh and Crefeld:

"Look at that, Gulland, you'll never get better walking than that. Soft to the feet, straight as a line, and likely to be pretty secluded at night."

Gulland nodded: "Bückeburg was the last station, wasn't it?" he remarked.

How well we got to know that place and the scarlet petticoats that were such a conspicuous feature in the peasant national costume there!

A most extraordinary little oasis, Bückeburg. The

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women, besides their scarlet skirts, wore head-dresses whose wings stretched out eighteen inches on either side of their heads. As they worked in the fields in this array they looked like large coloured beetles moving diligently about. Twenty or thirty miles away all such distinguishing marks had vanished, and the population had reverted to the habitual dinginess of European garments.

From the railway tantalizing glimpses could be caught of an old-fashioned palace garden with renaissance arches. In the days of our first Georges, Bückeburg was a name probably familiar in Court circles. We stopped at Hademsdorf, a small station in the pine forests, and as the Germans felt unable to trust us to march out into that country in the dark or unable to trust their power of persuading us to do it, they would not let us out of the train and we slept in the carriages where we sat. Hademsdorf was no more than a halt. There seemed to be no village attached to it.

In the early morning we were formed up and started to march along a shady road. It was nice to stretch our legs in the country, even if some of them were game ones, and the route was so lonely and at first so thickly grown about with pines that all the way I was thinking desperately of making a bolt for it, though I was somewhat deterred by my complete ignorance of the country and lack of provisions, as I had upon my back enough food for at most two days. I think it was lucky that our guards were too vigilant to give us any opening.

Before we left the woods we crossed a swiftly running river some fifty yards wide. It had a clear and sandy bottom.

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"I think that river could be waded, if necessary," Gulland murmured to me, as we tramped along.

After two or three hours we emerged from the trees into the largest, widest, and most desolate heath that I have ever seen. It was, I believe, part of the great Lüneburg heath, about the size of Oxfordshire; across it the murderers of Dr. Rathenau in 1922 wandered for three weeks with half the police of Germany after them and failing to catch them.

It was this sort of country that provided the Jacobite party with the taunts they were fond of flinging at the Hanoverians, to the effect that before aspiring to the throne of England the head of the House of Hanover was lord of nothing but an acre or so of cabbages and a thousand square miles of blasted heath.

We now followed a sandy track that ran for three or four miles between immense peat-hags. Dark, and oozing with water, they stretched away to the horizon on either side of us and formed the principal feature in the landscape. Nothing could have looked less encouraging. At last we turned a corner of the road at the top of a slight rise, and saw in front of us some low tin buildings behind a ten-foot high barricade of wire.

This was Schwarmstedt camp.

It had been worn bare of vegetation, and was no better than a dust-heap. The huts were of the usual flimsy, badly-joined war construction, with tarred wooden roofs.

As soon as we were through the gate my attention was entirely taken up by the extreme scarcity of visible sentries. Directly we dispersed I walked straight across to the opposite side of the camp, and

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was going to step over the rabbit-wire that formed the inner boundary about three yards within the high outer wire when a sentry very casually sloped into his beat just in front of me.

This first impression of paucity in the number of sentries was afterwards confirmed. There were very many fewer than we had been accustomed to at Gütersloh.

However, in the face of this one, I retired. But I felt indignant at being so lightly regarded, and rejoining my comrades in misfortune, I exclaimed:

"It's a positive insult that they should think they can guard us with half a man and a boy in this way."

For the time being we were kept occupied in sorting ourselves out and discovering that we should have to sleep twelve to fifteen in a room, with beds almost, if not quite, touching.

Everyone in my room was selected for it on account of his determination to escape, and I was pleased with my luck as regards quarters till I found that my head would lie practically over the open cesspool common to the hut.

As we unpacked our sadly diminished belongings the room echoed with scathing comments and pessimistic forecasts as to our future discomfort.

"Obviously a 'Strafe' camp," someone remarked. "And that old brute at Crefeld told us that we were not being punished and that this was all that was ideal!"

"The Feldwebel in the canteen told me there were five hundred Roumanian officers here, before we came along," another voice chimed in.

"It's the sort of thing a Roumanian *would* put up with!"

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"I wish to goodness our tins would come."

"If the grub's no better than the camp, we shan't do very well."

And more to the same purpose.

Soon after our simple household arrangements had been fixed up, we were summoned to an *Appell.* When duly ranged in four sides of a square, we were startled to see striding towards us across the sandy waste a colossal and resplendent figure clad in the spickest and spannest of Death's Head Hussar uniforms. General salutes all round, and propitiating courtesy from the Colossus, preceded a short speech from one of the very few gentlemen I met in Germany, and the only German I ever met who had an elementary sense of humour.

"I'm sorry," he began, "as Commandant, not to be able to welcome you to a better camp; but we shall do what we can to improve things. Meanwhile, I must warn you that the water is not fit to drink."

This was a bit of a staggerer, seeing that the only other liquid was represented by half a dozen lemonade bottles in the rudimentary canteen.

"Also I must warn you," he continued, "that the wine ration cards which will be issued to you are not valid for wine, as it does not exist here. They are only valid for bread. You see, like all Germans, we have the system, even if we have not the article. As you do not know where you are, I propose to sell maps in the canteen." Here he paused, and took time to notice the gladdened expression on sundry faces. "You see it would be quite useless for you to try to escape," he went on, "because the whole of this heath is surrounded by impassable bogs." Here he waved his

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hand to the horizon. "A hundred and sixty Roumanians got out last December. They all had to come back of their own accord; except those who were left for ever in the bog. Good evening, gentlemen."

It was astonishing, considering the matter of it, what a good impression this speech made on us. The Commandant was at once raised to the height of popularity, but nothing occurred during the rest of our sojourn there to make us think any better of the camp. We discovered that all over it there was water a foot beneath the surface of the ground. This was good neither for health nor for tunnelling.

The only event that broke the monotony was our being let out of the wire one day for a stroll. I made what study I could of the kinds of grasses that grew in the worst parts of the bog, and another man, MacNeile, and I, hunted for birds' nests; it was a wonderful place for birds; if bogs are what they fancy, they were certainly well provided with them here. Otherwise our days were of the dullest.

Meanwhile, Major Hall and two or three others had, without announcing their departure, left the camp by a route that started where a ditch crossed the barbed wire. The spot had struck us all as so obviously marked out for an exit that he had taken the precaution of hanging a blanket over the rabbit-wire opposite to it, in order to stake his claim.

A Canadian also vanished, all by himself, and in a manner unknown. It was a most eccentric performance, that.

I believe he ended up at Bielefeld, about whose station yard he afforded the enemy a long and exhausting chase when he emerged from the truck in which

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he had pinched a ride, successfully, up to a point, but unfortunately in the wrong direction.

The Huns were getting hectic, but had not yet increased the sentries. The heath was set on fire, and the Germans said the prisoners had done it when they were out for a walk. We had to hide so many missing friends now, at *Appells*, that these ceremonies generally took two hours. The Germans did not yet know us all by sight, and we spent all the time during the *Appells* in moving and shifting about so that we could answer to more names than our own. For instance, after my name was called, I would slip back and presently answer to "Robinson" or the name of someone else who had got away. The Germans invented a system by which all officers who had answered to their names crossed over to one side. However, we contrived so effectively to get back again, that at the end of that *Appell* they found they had twenty-five prisoners too many. By that time it was pitch dark. They caught me once, but I put on so beautifully innocent a face that they thought it must be their mistake.

Gulland and I decided to have a shot at getting away.

As nearly everyone else in the camp had resolved on the same procedure, we thought our chances would be better if we were among the early birds. We also thought that we had located the spot in the wire best suited to our purpose. Oddly enough, I believe it was the identical place where Watson, the Canadian, had got out.

We made our preparations forthwith. We had a compass, maker—Russell, R.F.C. It proved to be a reliable one, though a bit slow at the uptake. As to disguises, they were beyond our contrivance, but

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Gulland was optimistic on the subject. He vetoed my Glengarry, but said that his "Gorblimey" would pass in the dark. He also had a curious theory that his khaki tunic minus its brass buttons was just the sort of thing a German tourist would wear. I was robed in my macintosh.

In the matter of provisions the larder did not provide a great choice. Learned discussions about proteids and what Scott ate in the Antarctic expedition could not alter the unfortunate circumstance that we had nothing but a pound or two of Quaker Oats, about fifty tablets of Horlick's Malted Milk, and as many of Bovril; sixpenn'orth of chocolate, a few ounces of brown sugar, and the equivalent of six or seven small tins of meat. We calculated that our journey might take us twenty-three days, and of course we knew from the first that we should have desperately short commons. To hold this store of groceries we cut up German bath towels and sewed them into bags.

At this stage of our preparations a violent dispute arose between us.

Gulland, who was Indian Army to the core, would have it that the Quaker Oats must be made into chupatties.

"As chupatties," he said, "it will go twice as far."

He was ready to die in support of this creed. He was also nearly ready to kill me because I said:

"Quaker Oats are Quaker Oats whatever you do to 'em."

I added: "I don't suppose you know how to make chupatties."

"Made them before you were born," he retorted.

"Not out of Quaker Oats," I pointed out.

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At every camp on our escape our meals began in the same manner. Gulland's hand would dive into his towel bag, and he would produce from it a frayed remnant of a Quaker Oat chupatty.

"By gum, that's good!" he would exclaim. "I can't imagine why you were such a fool, Phillimore, as not to make your Quaker Oats into chupatties."

I for my part would be busily stirring some of my untreated Quaker Oats, with the aid of my finger and some water, in a small aluminium cup.

"I thought," I would remark pityingly, "you said that you believed in porridge more than in anything else? Just look at this——"

And so we would go on.

A change of clothing was provided by a spare shirt and a spare pair of socks for each of us. Cooking materials we deemed superfluous, and we considered that it would be dangerous to light a fire. Our packs, as finally put together, were not heavy, but any sort of pack drags at the shoulders and at the muscles of the heart after a mile or two. As a matter of fact the enlarged pockets of my "British Warm" constituted my pack; but it was a bad plan.

Schwarmstedt camp was shaped, roughly, like the letter T with its main gate half way up the stalk. The cross-piece at the head of the T formed a separate enclosure, containing the hospital, lock-up, and orderly room, and was shut off from the stalk, or main enclosure, by ten-foot wire like that which surrounded the whole camp. As you entered by the main gate you had on your left hand four long huts, built one behind the other, and on your right hand two smaller ones, beyond some garden ground.

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Our hut was the first on the left and in the upper part of the T stalk. Our scheme was to get out of the window of the room at the end of it furthest from the main gate, and near the angle formed by the boundary wire with the wire separating us from the hospital enclosure that formed the head of the T.

Outside the camp facing our hut stood a large store shed, and near to the gate was an engine-house containing a very noisy engine for supplying light to the camp.

Between the angle of the wires and the main gate there was only one sentry. The space that intervened between him and the sentry on the long side of the hospital enclosure was not actually on the beat of either of them; the short end fronting the hospital being at certain moments out of sight of both. We hoped that we might have the luck to hit on such a moment. Inside the wire at night a guard patrolled round and round the camp, looking into each hut as he passed in order to make sure that all was safe and still. The great arc lights that surrounded the place and turned night into day all over the camp enabled him to see clearly in at the prisoners' windows at any hour. However, there was no arc light actually at the angle of the wire.

We arranged with some one that on a certain night he should, from his bed, keep watch out of the window at the back of the room at the end of the hut till he saw the guard reach the point most distant from us at the far corner of the stalk of the T. When that happened our watcher was to signal the fact to us by means of a grunt. If, when he grunted, we, where we were watching from the front window, could see the

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sentry on the front beat nearing the main gate and having his back turned to us, we would at that moment dash out and climb the wire in the corner opposite the hospital, trusting that the noise of the engine would prevent him from hearing any sound we might make. Once over the wire we should get a certain amount of shade from the large storehouse. As for the other sentry at the far side of the T head-piece, we had to chance his being at our end at the critical moment, but we felt that that would be a piece of unnecessary ill-luck.

Not a word was said to the occupants of the end room till the middle of the appointed night. When wakened from their beauty sleep to find themselves in the thick of events, the majority of the rightful inhabitants of the room failed to display any great enthusiasm regarding our antics; most of them contented themselves with turning over and going to sleep again after reluctantly opening an eye. One who was sleeping in a bed by the front window was unable to take things so calmly, because when the guard passed the hut and looked in, both Gulland and I had to lie on that particular bed, and incidentally on its owner. He was very indignant, and afterwards, as well as at the time, maintained that he was permanently injured in a vital part by our weight, which certainly was not that of thistle-down.

Several times our Sister Anne at the back window grunted enlighteningly in token that the guard had reached the far corner of the camp, before the sentry on whom our own eyes were glued happened simultaneously to reach his appointed spot. At last, the desired coincidence arrived; just as he drew near to

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the main gate another grunt came from our watcher, and we knew that the time had come.

"Now," breathed Gulland, and as he murmured the word I, who was to go first, sprang to the window.

CHAPTER VII

WE WALK IN THE MOONLIGHT

At the very first start off, I stuck in the window.

I squeezed, I pushed, I wriggled, I heaved. No good. I was stuck. I went on sticking.

"What on earth is happening to you? Why don't you get on?" The frenzied anxiety in Gulland's whisper behind me urged me to renewed efforts.

Perhaps I needed urging. Perhaps my inability to compress myself into something smaller, to bend my ankle that eighth of an inch more that was needed to get my foot out of the angle of the window frame in which it was jammed, was partly due to my being half paralysed by funk. It is difficult, in looking back on a moment of intense excitement, to sort out with any attempt at accuracy the feelings that accompanied it. Mine certainly were mixed. I wanted to get out, right enough; but the scheme had never struck me as a very hopeful one. The probability of a bullet in the back has not for me the kind of irresistible charm that sends me hurrying to meet it with winged feet—that is if one can hurry to meet a bullet in the back.

Anyhow, my feet made a great nuisance of themselves that night; perhaps the stiffness of my nailed boots contributed to my difficulties; possibly the fact that I

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am built on the large side, more on the lines of the rhinoceros than the gazelle, is not much of a help when it is a question of jumping through windows that measure about 3 ft. by 2. Anyhow, there I was. There I seemed to be fixed.

"Can't get my foot out," I murmured. "I've got stuck somehow!"

Our chances of escape, such as they were, depended on a time-table in which minutes, not hours, seconds, indeed, rather than minutes, figured most prominently.

We had no time to waste in sticking in windows. Every instant that I hung there, mere flicker of eternity though it might be, diminished our hope of getting over that wire before the patrol came round or the sentry came back from the end of his beat.

For the moment the only sounds came from the room behind me. Slight sounds, mostly the breathing of sleeping men. Out of the eight occupants of the room six took so little interest in the crazy proceedings of Gulland and myself that they were asleep.

A final shove into which Gulland put his entire soul finally did the trick. I burst out like a cork from a bottle, and an instant later was racing for the corner with him hard on my heels.

As I was the elder and the heavier, we had settled I should have the advantage of the angle made by the ten-foot barbed wire separating the hospital enclosure from the main camp, with the similar wire which constituted the outer barrier.

We had placed an empty wooden box the evening before in a careless but handy position up against the inner rabbit-wire so as to afford a convenient stile, and in a twinkling I was over that, and running up the

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separation wire. At the top I was able to get my leg over the corner pretty easily, but my breeches caught on a barb and delayed me for an agonizing moment. At the end of it I descended to the outer side in safety, but minus portions of both breeches and leg.

Gulland, with great agility, clambered up and over the outer fence in spite of its awkward inward tilt, and we shot across into the shadow of the storehouse, with our hearts hammering against our ribs.

It was a welcome patch of shadow, but we passed it in a second. On we flew over a few yards of firm ground, and then we were in the peat-hags. Deprived of even the false feeling of increasing security given by rapid motion, we floundered and leapt from one shaking peat-hag to another while those cursed arc lights seemed to hold us still silhouetted for the sentries to fire at. Not a sound came from behind us except the throb, throbbing of the engine, but it was impossible to believe that we were not being pursued; and before us stretched mile upon mile of this awful peat.

Black and shining with moisture it lay, the wetness reflecting back the light from the arc lamps, and the blackness concealing from us the treacherous pitfalls it presented for our undoing at every step.

On we plunged. We jumped from tussock to tussock; we fell, picked ourselves up, fell again, got up, and staggered on; gasped, panted, dropped a leg down to the knee in an indistinguishable hole just as we thought we had got it balanced on a tuft. They grew close together, those tufts, sometimes so close that no gap between them was visible at all, and you strode forward

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to your fall thinking you had at last found a firm foothold.

At first we ran, rather wildly as to direction, falling at every few steps, crawling out on to a new tussock, and slipping back into the bog. Soon we were so soused and coated with mud that possibly any guard who might have seen us would have taken us merely for peat-hags that trembled rather more violently than the usual shaking and quaking of the bog.

We had decided, in defiance of the Commandant's warning, to make across the moor to the south-west. By doing this we should avoid the track to the station, while going in the general direction we aimed at. Not many people, certainly, would have gone the way we took; and as we dragged ourselves over and through the last half mile I felt that it was well on the cards that our fate would be the same as the Roumanians'. The ground grew squadgier and squadgier, and it was all we could do, by linking hands and jumping from bog-myrtle tuft to bog-myrtle tuft, to keep from sinking altogether. The arc lights pursued us in the most pitiless manner. It was amazing to see how far they carried. But after about three miles of this frightful going, dark shapes began to loom against the sky ahead of us, and soon these were to be distinguished as being the leafy branches of some willow trees. Wading and splashing, we struggled towards them, and at length by a final succession of heaves and plunges we hoisted ourselves on to a peaty meadow which, if not quite dry enough to be called terra firma, was at least firmer terra.

Very glad we were to set foot on it, and with renewed energy we crossed two or three similar meadows at a

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smart pace. But the sun rises early on May 29th, and it was not long before we heard in the distance the noise of a scythe being whetted. Good cover was very scarce, and after looking wildly round, we ended by throwing ourselves down in a small clump, no larger than a room, of alder bushes and bog-myrtle, with a wire fence running along one side of it. We had to burrow well into the bog-myrtle in order to get quite out of sight, but once there we had plenty of time to rest and to hug ourselves in our freedom.

It seemed impossible to believe that after so many months of scheming and labour, all ending in bitter disappointment, the longed-for day had dawned at last, and that we were actually at large. Why had we not been shot as we climbed the wire, or while we crawled and leapt among the peat-hags? We must have been visible for ages. What could the sentries have been doing? Were the Huns so sure of recapturing us that they did not think it was worth while to dirty their boots by following us into the mud? Were they waiting for us even now, at some point further on?

At all events we were free, and surely the difficulties in store for us could not be greater than those with which we had already grappled. Yet in spite of all efforts to reassure ourselves, we could not get rid of the haunting nightmare of pursuit. It hung over us all day as we lay among the leaves; from time to time the voices of haymakers or the distant rumbling of a passing wagon sent our hearts into our mouths. But there was no sign of the chase till late in the afternoon, when the sound of a heavy man walking at a tremendous rate from the direction of the camp startled us

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horribly and we flattened ourselves closer than ever to the ground in snipe-like postures.

Twang, twang, went the wire, and we held our breath. He was very close to us. But in another instant we heard him striding on, and gradually his footsteps died away. Had he seen us? Could he possibly not have done so? At any rate there was nothing to be done, so we did nothing.

I don't recommend a swamp of alder bushes and bog-myrtle as the place in which most happily to spend a motionless day, lying on one's back. But we English pride ourselves upon our consideration for dumb animals, and there can be no doubt that Gulland and I were a godsend to the mosquitoes. On the other hand, he who would include the mosquito among the dumb must himself be classed among the deaf, and why should it not be equally incumbent on these winged songsters to show some consideration for the deaf? However, they appear to be devoid of any feeling of chivalry. By the time we rose up from our long rest we were a mass of blood from elbow to finger and from hair to chin, and in a fever from the poison of the stings.

For the best part of an hour we had had to lie flat on our backs while there descended upon us a tropical thunderstorm that reached such dimensions that the water flowed under my twenty-six inch waist (Note, *nous avons changé tout cela.*) In other ways it was an extraordinarily pleasant day. The persistence with which the crane robbed the crow of all the biggest sticks in its nest above our heads and flew triumphantly back with them over us to her own tree some twenty yards away and there inserted them in an

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erection she considered more worthy of good material, prevented any feeling of dullness. It was nice, too, to listen to the drumming of the snipe.

Later, with the aid of a pin, I pricked a page of my diary in the fly-leaf of a pocket volume of *Henry IV*. It was our only literary provender, and later on we had to tear it in half so that both of us could read at the same time.

We were only a mile or two from the banks of the Aller, the river we had crossed on our way up from the station. We were confronted with the prospect of crossing it again, and also the Leine, which joins it some few miles to the north. Further on we should have to get over the Weser, and last of all the Ems.

These four rivers, our shortage of food, and our inadequate maps, were our main bugbears. It is all very fine to talk of swimming rivers; for an escaper it is out of the question till the end of his journey, because it means that all his food will be soaked, and subsequently putrified. Besides, the calls on his physique are quite exacting enough without adding the weight and discomfort of saturated clothes. So we intended, if we could, to cross the Aller and the Leine before they met and became one wide stream too deep to wade.

That night the moon rose early and lit up with magic beauty the pine forest that we presently entered. The first part of that walk was pure enjoyment, except for one episode. The going was quite easy; we found beautiful tracks, and all went well and smoothly until suddenly we caught sight of a human-looking object lurking in the shadow of the pines. A poisonous,

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crouching figure it looked, just as if it was waiting to pounce. I stopped dead, twitching Gulland's sleeve as I did so, and together we sank sideways off the track and into the trees. There we crouched for a good five minutes, neither watcher nor watched moving so much as an eyebrow.

Surely no human figure would remain motionless for so long? Simultaneously the doubt came to us both, and by a common impulse we crept cautiously forward. A moment later the light struck our terrifier at a different angle, and he stood revealed for what he was—no other than a juniper bush.

Our nerves were bad. We crossed a road, and for the next five minutes plunged through a field of corn not a couple of hundred yards from a farmhouse. At its far side we broke through a fence and emerged upon a great waste of grassy land.

Before and below us a sea of white mist reflected the moonlight and lay like a shining veil between us and the landscape.

Far above us we could hear the cry of plover as they wheeled invisibly through the night, somewhere in the clouds of vapour behind which the moon had vanished. The compass was produced and by its aid we steered slowly down a gentle incline. As we descended there arose around us a weird chorus that filled the whole air and grew louder at every step we took. It brought something back into my mind, but at first I could only grope there for it, while elusive, as half roused memories are apt to be, it continually evaded me. Then suddenly I pinned it down as the recollection of the spruit outside Middelburg flashed across me.

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"Frogs!" I exclaimed, turning triumphantly to Gulland.

"Well, that means that the river must be near," he answered. And the next moment we nearly walked into it. I think we were only stopped from actually doing so by the plopping and the splashes of the frogs as they took to the water in their thousands at our approach.

This was the river we meant to walk across. As I was taller than Gulland, I took off my clothes and waded gingerly in. It was delicious; the water was warm to the skin, and the smooth and sandy floor most restful and pleasant to the toes. I got about thirty yards over; but the stream set to the farther side, and the next minute I was off my feet. Back I came.

"No good," I said to Gulland. "We couldn't get the things over dry."

This was a nasty knock.

"What's to be done now?" I asked.

"Put your clothes on," Gulland tersely replied.

While I was struggling into them he wandered idly along the bank, and suddenly I saw him dart to the edge of the water. A minute more and he came quickly back to me.

"A boat," he exclaimed, in some excitement. "There's a boat tied to the bank just down there!"

"Gracious! What luck!" I ejaculated. "Does it look as if it would float?" I added.

"It's a perfectly good boat," Gulland assured me.

This heaven-sent craft had sculls placed ready to our hands. A few strokes carried us into the rushes on the far side. There we left our transport, presumably to the great annoyance of the locals.

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As we stepped ashore an owl hooted in the wood above us and was answered by another. The last of the Mohicans, or the Crees or Sioux Indians? My scalp tightened convulsively on my head. Decidedly my nerves were not all that they might have been.

We pushed on up the hill, and came at the top to a road with a signpost indicating that it led to Schwarmstedt town, and beyond that to a town called Neustadt. This we followed, and soon passed through a small hamlet where the barking dogs added to my terrors. No one heeded their warning, however. We had not meant to go into Schwarmstedt itself, but before we knew where we were we were in the middle of it. As we drew near the big inn a shadow detached itself from behind a corner of it.

"Halt!" said the shadow in commanding tones.

CHAPTER VIII

WE AIR OUR GERMAN

We halted, as to the manner born, and twisted our paralysed necks towards the oncoming figure. It had one stiff leg, as we quickly observed; but it had a stiff stick as well. It wore a uniform cap but a civilian dress. It, also, looked rather startled. After the mosquitoes and the thunderstorm and the bog, we were not very likely-looking objects; and we, too, had sticks.

"Where are you going?"

"To Neustadt," I replied as ingratiatingly as I could. It was the name that we had seen on the signpost.

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"This is not a proper time of night to be walking about."

But if he imagined I was going to be led away into the mazes of a verbose disquisition on academical points like that, he had mistaken his man. He had also mistaken his man's knowledge of the language.

I coldly ignored his contribution to the conversation.

"Ist das richtig?" said I, these being the only three words I could string together. I indicated that I was referring to the road before us by staring fixedly past him and in the direction in question.

But instead of following my gaze his eyes were fastened, with a deplorable want of tact, upon my bare head.

"Why haven't you got a cap?" he demanded rudely.

"Ist das richtig?" I repeated doggedly. I hoped that he was slowly gathering the impression that I was one of those strong, resolute men of action rather than of words. But if he was impressed, he hid it from us. Still, he varied his question.

"Have you papers?" he asked.

"Ist das richtig?" I inquired.

Perhaps my versatile talk failed to interest him. Perhaps he hoped by getting rid of the subject to induce in me a more informative frame of mind. At all events he suddenly snapped out an answer.

"Ja."

"So!" said I. "Guten Abend," I added as an afterthought, thereby demonstrating that I could talk on more topics than one if I chose. Without waiting for any repartee from him we strode forward.

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As soon as we had turned the corner we broke into a run.

We tore along, rather at random; across the railway, over the allotments of the porters, leaving huge footprints in the cabbage-beds; up a hill and through a kind of suburb, till at the top we came upon open country. It was a lot too open. The only cover in sight was a tiny wood of little larches to the right of the road.

We had no supply of water for the day, so we had to stop to spend an agonized minute or two in scraping some up from the bottom of the ditch by the side of the road. While we were doing this we were scared by the sound of approaching wheels, and off we darted into the plantation, before we had collected more than a very scanty store. I expect it was the early morning milk-cart, which was the bane of our existence during the escape.

The young trees in the plantation were at that stage when they lose their lowest branches and are big enough to have killed the grass growing around their roots. We lay beneath them on the bare ground, and felt that it was bare to the point of indecency. We spent that day watching the feet and ankles of the *élite* of Schwarmstedt walking along the track beside the wood. I remember one pair of very neat ankles encased in smart white stockings and propelled by small feet in rather gorgeous shoes. Alongside of them moved the lower extremities of some beautifully creased trousers. No doubt, I thought, an officer out for his Sunday airing with his geliebtes Fräulein.

On the opposite side the plantation was bounded by the paling of a villa's garden, behind which the

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villa's children played most of the day. In even closer proximity we had as neighbour the remains of a defunct hen, unluckily beyond the edible stage. This did little to relieve the monotony of the long day we passed there; but it was broken most unpleasantly by the conduct of a noisome little dog which rushed through the corner of the wood, yapping violently. Still, no one found us. A day spent as this one was, though, in the midst of alarms, is very bad for the nerves; and as I have said, ours were already nothing to boast of.

We dared not move till late that night. It was unsatisfactory to reflect that this, our third night out, found us no more than seven or eight miles from our starting-point. When it was quite dark we set forth again, made our way over a number of fields and across the line; and so, after walking for two or three miles, came to river number two.

The Leine was obviously not to be forded. It was a wide and a fast-flowing stream, running between steep and high banks and showing marks of winter floods over thirty feet above the present level. For a mile or so we followed its course; it was very slow going and rough walking in the darkness; stumbling along in such circumstances soon became a tiring process. The river twisted like a corkscrew, which made it difficult to reckon how far we were going.

A bright idea struck Gulland.

"Why not make a raft?" he suggested. "We'll go on till we find a gate, and take it off its hinges and lace in branches till it will float."

At first I, also, was attracted by this idea, and we proceeded to carry it out. But in vain did we weave fir branches in and out of the bars of our gate; it only

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became heavier and heavier and if anything less watertight. I saw that it would sink as soon as launched.

"Look here," I said, "to make this seaworthy we should have to spend a day over it."

For a long time Gulland would not be convinced. He clung to his pet plan, and we had a long argument about it; but in the end we had to give it up, and we walked on again, up the river. We went another mile or so along the bank, and then came to a long suspension bridge with a wooden floor, leading to a village whose church we could see upon the opposite shore.

It looked as though it must be guarded; but after watching it for some time without seeing anyone, we decided to risk it, and so, with great misgivings, we distrustfully tiptoed across. We passed safely through the sleeping village, and went on along a road beyond it. We had now negotiated the first two rivers, and we intended to follow roads that led in a south-westerly direction till we struck the big canal we had spotted from the train. It was not the most direct route that we might have taken from the camp to the Dutch frontier, but we reckoned that nowhere else should we hit upon such good going as we should find by the canal. I am not sure, however, that it was worth the long detour.

All night till break of dawn we walked along the road, becoming very thirsty before daylight began to appear; for nowhere was there any water. We wished we had filled our bottles at the Leine, but water is heavy to carry, and we had no expectation of such a scarcity. There was also, to our dismay, a terrible lack of cover. At last we saw a wooded hill standing among some fields on our right, and we decided that there

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we must make our lodging for the day. The only water to be seen was a little marsh near by, and we stooped beside it, pushing our drinking utensils into the mud to collect what moisture there was to be extracted from it. Then we hurried on to the wood, where we threw ourselves down in some heather among the trees. We were none too soon ensconced. It was not long before the fields all round were invaded by women and children come out to work in them, and with them a few labourers.

A notable episode that day was the discovery of a newt in the water we had scooped out of the swamp. I nearly drank it, and it is hard to say which was the most thankful that I noticed it in time, myself or the newt. The next calamity was the finding of a hole in one of our most valuable meat tins. This was a frightful blow: the number we had was barely enough to justify our opening one tin every two days, and the loss of one of them like this fairly poisoned the morning for us.

"Do you think we really must chuck it away?" I dismally inquired of Gulland. "I can hardly bear to. The green grease on the top looks so delicious."

However, he was firm with me.

It was not a good hiding-place; the trees and bushes grew too thinly. We never felt safe all day, for all around us people were working in the fields. It was lovely weather, and the workers seemed unnecessarily cheerful; we heard a good deal of singing and whistling, with now and again a burst of laughter. However, nothing happened, and that evening we removed ourselves successfully from the hill and made our way on to the highroad.

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Before we had gone a quarter of a mile along it, we were overtaken by a patrol on a bicycle—one man, in uniform, who gave us a piercing look but made no remark. He passed on, leaving us scared to fits. These frights played upon our nerves in the most unholy fashion, and took it out of us more than miles of mere tramping would have. Not only that, but they turned us off the good going on to ground that was far more trying. We could have gone much further if we had felt calmer.

"That fellow will just keep on till he reaches the next village," Gulland said to me, "and there he'll rouse up his pals and they'll be all ready and waiting for us when we put our heads into the trap."

"That's about it," I agreed; "we must go right round and get back to the road on the far side of the village."

So off we went across country to our right, and soon stumbled into a bog, where, strangely enough, a lot of high timber was growing. It was a place that was easier to get into than out of; in the darkness we could not tell what we were coming to, and so staggered about in marshes and woods all night, making very little progress. After a while we came upon the railway from Nienburg to Hanover, which here runs on a high embankment, whose sides were covered with thorny bushes of acacia.

We clambered up, glad to be on dry ground again, and followed the line for the rest of the night. When daylight began to creep into the sky we saw that the country ahead appeared to be open and unwooded. It was not, of course, light enough to see this definitely, and we had always to judge as best we could by the contour of the landscape in so far as it was visible.

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When we could make out the silhouettes of hills in front of us we argued that we should find their steeper slopes grown about with trees or bushes, whereas flat country is usually cultivated. As the country in front and ahead of us that morning looked flattish, we decided to lie up before we emerged from the marshes.

We went down from the high embankment and found cover at the bottom, where spruce-firs grew in the swamp by the side of a muddy stream. It was not a spot I could recommend for sleeping purposes, but it was secure. The German child does not play about on railway embankments, and we were quite overshadowed; but the mosquitoes were very bad.

The next night we soon came out of the wood, and found ourselves on a level plain of peat, divided into rectangles by broad green roads. Here, where the railway made a wide half-circle, one of these green tracks cut across it as the string cuts across the arc of a bow, so that by following this short cut we got on fast. The way the land was laid out puzzled us very much till we put together the facts that all the small-holdings were brand new and that the soil was nothing but peat. We concluded that we had stumbled on one of those settlements which the Germans had been establishing on waste land for the last thirty years in order to build up food supplies in the event of a war. They had drained the boggy ground with canal-like ditches such as one sees in the Fens.

In that place we began to try to live on the country by eating bean and pea stalks, as there were no potatoes. The peas and beans were about nine inches high and quite good.

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CHAPTER IX

WE JOURNEY ON

WHEN we reached the railway again our green track led us straight to a level crossing, where a light was burning. The hard road to Wunstorf, along which we wanted to go, seemed to be just on the other side of the line, where we could see, not more than fifty yards away, a signpost, with a bench beneath it, lighted up, more or less, by the railway light.

We listened intently, heard nothing, and silently stole across.

"Where are you going?" I murmured, as Gulland, the road-finder, advanced straight along in the full glare of the electric arc.

"I'm going to see what's on that signpost." he answered.

I was exceedingly nervous and tried to argue with him; but he was not to be deterred, and we strode on, our feet scrunching loudly on the gravel. Under the signpost we stopped, and I looked up at it and read the name in a glance. Then I lowered my head and looked down straight into the eyes of a Hun in full uniform.

He was sitting under the post with his back to us, but he turned his head just as I looked down into his china-blue eyes. His legs were crossed; a rifle lay across his knees. Speechless, we stared at one another.

Half a second later Gulland saw him. We turned simultaneously and departed thence, every atom of feeling of which we were capable concentrated in the small of our backs.

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Small, no doubt, is the correct term. But at such a moment that part of one's anatomy seems to offer a target too large to be missed by the worst of shots. It is an odious sensation.

We walked on, not daring to hurry conspicuously, scarcely able to walk slowly.

We walked for about two miles before we dared to breathe again.

Why that sentry neither spoke nor moved I have never been able to guess.

It was a fearful road for nerve-racked fugitives. The marsh lay on both sides and prevented us from leaving it. We hoped to bear to the right before leaving Wunstorf, but at the point where we meant to branch off we came to an enormous stretch of shallow water, full of tufts of reeds and inhabited by millions of frogs.

This lake made it necessary for us to keep on till we came to the suburbs of Wunstorf, and we had to pass through these before we were able to turn westward. Three or four miles further the ground began to grow firmer underfoot, while the country became more undulating, so that soon we were climbing the low rise that separates the valley of the Leine from that of the Weser. Presently we made out, looming in front of us, a huge wood with a little-used road running into it. This, we thought, looked safer than the road we were on, so up it we went.

It was a wood of gigantic oaks whose foliage spread a pitchy blackness through which we groped onward for ages, till at last we began to hear the sound of hounds baying, and by various small signs we gathered that we were in the private domain of some baronial seigneur. The noise made by the hounds grew louder and louder.

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We were obviously getting closer to the house, when suddenly, as we crossed a patch of moonlight, a little man emerged from the shadows and came, walking pit-a-pat, towards us. White-haired, arrayed in seedy, carefully preserved black clothes, he looked the picture of a nobleman's ancient retainer who had been pensioned off and dug up to replace some servant gone to the war.

"Guten Abend," said I, mustering what shred of confidence I could.

"Guten Abend," he replied, and passed on his way.

What, I wonder, did he think we were doing outside his master's castle? What was he doing there himself at 2 a.m.? He must have been pretty frightened of us; or was it because he was stricken dumb by his own conscience that he said no more? We could not be certain whether the noise made by the hounds came from the house or the lodge of some keeper, but as we continued to advance, glimpses of shrubberies and a general transition from the wildness of the high woods to a more tended and cared-for appearance convinced us, one way and another, that we were drawing too near to the house; so we dived off to the left and gradually returned to open country, and then back to a road with fruit trees set on either side of it.

It was too open altogether. Soon it began to grow light all round us, and nowhere at hand was there a bush or a tree except the line of fruit trees to right and left; only a good way ahead, beyond a village below us, we could see trees and hedges. We went down a long incline till we reached the village, hurried through it and into the low and wet pastures on the further side.

There was an oak spinney alongside one of these

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meadows; it was far too narrow and there was no cover; it had besides a footpath running along the edge; but I was very beat, and in desperation we flung ourselves down upon a carpet of bluebells, all wringing wet. Curiously enough, lying all day in soaking wet doesn't seem to have any ill effects in summer weather, bitterly cold though it be in the early morning.

After ten minutes I felt myself rested just clear of the point of exhaustion, so I heaved myself up and said to Gulland:

"This won't do; we can't stay here."

"All right," he said, "but I wish you'd said so before. We shall have to go back through that village and lie down in the rye."

It was bright day as we retraced our steps, and pure luck that we were not spotted. We went up the slope behind the village, and walked down between a crop of rye and one of wheat, holding aloft the skirts of our coats so as not to knock the stalks of corn about more than we could help. Then very gingerly we made our way into the crop for about twenty yards. The dew-brushed path we left behind us seemed terribly conspicuous.

There we lay down, pulling the rye stalks underneath us to lie on. It was green but already in ear, and even wetter than the bluebells. This was the first time we had lain up in standing crops. The first of many times.

Thick rye, entered carefully, makes excellent covert. No one, unless he is right above you, is in the least likely to notice that the corn has been bent in a little strip the length and width of a man's body.

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But it is quite unexpectedly uncomfortable. It is just bare ground drenched with dew, and as it is, of course, entirely unprotected by trees, it becomes by midday scorchingly hot and induces a fearful thirst.

The spinneys in the meadows below the village that we had abandoned as too precarious must have been in the valley of the canal for which we were aiming: for in the course of the following night, having worked in a westerly direction for some time, we came down off the slopes, and struck it at last.

We had now been out for five days and nights and were feeling the strain somewhat severely. When we suddenly came upon a gipsy camp with the familiar caravan in the background, we held an earnest consultation as to whether there was much chance of their helping us along or not, if we took them into our confidence. How gipsy caravans could be moving about Germany in the middle of the war will always be a mystery to me, since gipsies in that part of the Empire, though technically not enemies, were probably Czechs or of some other origin unfriendly to the Huns. We decided, after discussing the question, that the risk was too great; but again when we were actually on the canal bank we very seriously considered the possibility of getting the canal boatmen to smuggle us through into Holland. The canal system we had reached runs right up into Holland, using the water of the Weser and Ems and joining up with the Rhine.

We narrowly missed an encounter with an obvious skipper in a square, double-breasted blue serge coat, whom I put down in my own mind as a Dutchman. His barges were lying in the canal where we struck it, and he himself had all the appearance of being just off

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for a quiet evening's enjoyment at the "Pig and Whistle." I now think it might have been better to try it, but the difficulty was to know which barges were Dutch and which German; so we eventually gave up the idea of help from that quarter and went on our way.

The canal, at all events, came up to all our expectations in the matter of its towing path, which afforded the best and straightest walking we had yet experienced. We had, however, come upon it east of where it crosses the Weser and east of the big town of Minden, in whose neighbourhood there was, as we knew, at least one large prisoners' camp; so after a few more miles we again began a detour to the north, aiming for a small village on the Weser where we thought we might find a ferry or unguarded bridge.

On our way we soon found ourselves in fairly thickly populated country, long villages following one another in quick succession along the road. About 3.30 that morning we began, rather doubtfully, to run the gauntlet of a village which proved to be more than a mile in length, so that it was broad daylight, and people were stirring everywhere, long before we could see the end of the houses. It was raining, too, and we were soaked through and through; and Gulland in particular felt the cold very much, and was chilled to the bone.

Some sort of shelter, and if possible, warmth, was indicated. By a wild inspiration we turned sharply into a private garden; and found there a shed that did not look much used, though it was within twenty feet of the house. Inside the shed was a loft made of small poles laid across from beam to beam, and on the poles was some loose hay.

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It seemed a mad thing to do, but to continue to walk about the village in broad daylight was not exactly sane, either. We climbed up and arranged ourselves in the hay. It was very nice and warm, but whenever you moved the poles rattled beneath you.

It was a Sunday morning. The good people of the house spent the day, except during church time, in pottering about their garden, just outside, and often came into the shed below, but it did not occur to them to visit the loft.

They must have been rather surprised to see two ruffians emerge from their shed in the late dusk that evening and make hurriedly for the fields, taking the back fence of the garden in their stride. For us it was an awful moment when, having peered carefully out and arrived at the conclusion that no one was about, we came round the corner of the shed and found several of the family standing near the house gloating over their cabbages in an after-dinner ecstasy.

CHAPTER X

OUR GOOSE IS COOKED

We got safely away, and came presently to the village on the Weser as marked on our map. It turned out to be on a high bank above the river and to have no bridge; but after our previous experience this did not daunt us much.

There was no ferry either, or we could not find it, but we did ultimately find a very large and heavy punt that appeared not to have been launched since the

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beginning of the war. It lay on some shingle, yards above the water, and was chained to a mooring-post. Above it stood an old factory, or tile-works, on a mound. The whole scene was almost exactly like Rembrandt's *Mill*.

We thought at first that we could not possibly move the boat. By dint of heaving alternately sideways and forwards, making the while the most terrific noise on the beach, we did contrive to do it, but we had to pull up the mooring-posts.

As soon as it was in the water, our craft began to fill rapidly, and we only just managed to edge it over to the farther bank before it became quite full. We got slightly wet, but kept our packs dry, which was the main point.

A mile or so brought us to a little wood of pine and heather, set in the midst of fields. It was getting light, and we were confronted with our daily problem of finding cover before it got lighter. There was no alternative to this wood, so we slunk into it, and found on its fringe a strip as wide as a room where it was planted with quite young pines and thick with heather. Tired and hungry we cast ourselves down and made ourselves as comfortable as we could.

As I was preparing to go to sleep, a little bird flew out of the heather from a tuft within six inches of my head. Investigation disclosed a wood-wren's nest with five or six eggs in it just behind my back hair. I was very much exercised in my mind as to whether to eat the eggs or not; but they were so tiny and were probably not fresh; and the bird hovered near and behaved in such a plaintive manner that I rolled further away, whereupon she went back.

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Some eight feet from us there was a pine taller than the rest. In its branches, fifteen feet overhead, was a great big nest of clay and thick stalks.

"Must be a magpie or hawk," Gulland mumbled sleepily.

"I shall look later, when I'm less tired," said I, "if everything seems quiet and safe."

But Fortune decided against my little plan.

Towards nine o'clock that morning we were startled by the sound of footsteps, and peeping through the tufts of the heather we saw a youth of about sixteen coming through the wood. He went straight to the tree, and without a glance to right or left, proceeded to go up it. It seemed absolutely impossible that he could help seeing us, yet we froze ourselves into that state of rigid immobility which in such cases offers the only chance of escaping detection. He reached the top and forthwith emitted a piercing yell. The sound made me feel quite sick.

I was lying with my face buried in the heather, but I could feel his hostile eyes darting from me to Gulland, and from Gulland to our belongings that lay scattered around us.

It would take a miracle to save us now.

Miracles do happen.

The boy's shout was answered by a girl's voice from the field, and crack, crack, went the rotten boughs, as he swiftly lowered himself to the ground. A turn of his heel, and he was off. Somehow I felt that it was not the step of the man who goes to fetch the police.

It seemed incredible that he had not seen us; but whether he had or not, it was impossible to get away,

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as at that time of day there were people working in all the fields around the wood.

Next night we headed south-west and west, in the direction of the canal, crossing a very deserted and stony waste, covered with flat, crumbly stones the size of a book, and sparsely dotted with patches of heather and pines; but at one point before we reached this solitary wilderness we found ourselves committed to a lane, and came suddenly on four unarmed German soldiers talking to some girls in the moonlight in the middle of the road.

They looked up sharply and we nervously wished them "Guten Abend."

There was an anxious moment before they answered, but they only laughed, readjusted their arms round their girls' waists, and we went on. They must have been on leave from the garrison at Münster or Osnabrück.

Again in the early morning we were overtaken by a civilian on a bicycle. He looked at us with a keen scrutiny, turned sharply down a road which we saw would take him back to the village whence he came, and went off at a tremendous pace.

We dashed into some marshy fields and by the time we were forced to lie up we had shaken off all pursuit. Just as the first milk-cart was coming along to take the morning milk to the station, we tucked ourselves into another field of rye.

Opposite us, across some low land, we could see through the rye-heads a very attractive range of blue hills. On the map this area was marked with the designation "Wiehen Geb."

This name had puzzled us before, and now that we

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were in sight of it, it produced still more speculation. It was not till much later, when my German had greatly improved, that I found out that Geb. was short for Gebirge, or hills.

We had now finished our detour to avoid Minden, and we got back next evening to the canal. We had been eight days and nights in reaching this point, and the disparity between our food supply and the distance we had still to cover began to look very alarming. We were at last heading plumb straight for Holland; from now on, every mile we put behind us would bring us a mile nearer to our goal, whereas previously, during our many detours, we hardly knew whether we were advancing or not. Now we could make fairly definite calculations, and we saw that it was a very near thing whether or not we could possibly do it on the food.

We ran into very few people on the tow-path; but that first night we came upon four men getting water from the bank. As we drew near we were surprised to see them cower down. Four more solid, chunky sort of men I have seldom seen, but they seemed as if turned into stone by our sudden appearance out of the mist. One of them threw up an arm before his forehead in a pathetic gesture of self-defence, and as he did so I had a glimpse of a yellow band on his sleeve, the hall-mark of the prisoner. The Germans always cut out pieces of stuff from their prisoners' uniforms in order to insert others of different colours. An instant later I caught sight of the cap on the head of another of the men. It was that of a Russian private. Like us, they were escapers.

In such garb it may be imagined what chance of

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success these poor fellows might look for; and this consideration had the largest influence in the decision we were obliged immediately to make as to whether or not we ought to show our sympathy in a practical form by sharing with them our map, if not our food. Unfortunately, too, our experience did not justify our regarding all Russians as whole-hearted allies; so I said nothing to them but "Good-evening" in my best German, and we strode rapidly forward into the hazy night. I fear they did not get very far.

We were both, by this time, very, very tired. We had had so little to eat. When we started we had taken with us an amount of food calculated to last us twenty-three days; and twenty-three days' rations, however small, are very heavy. It had become impossible that we should carry with us more than the absolute minimum we thought we could possibly exist on; and now we found existence on that minimum an exhausting business. Our minds were concentrated on the question of whether we could last out till we reached the frontier; and as we dragged ourselves on and on, we counted the miles with the absorbed interest I have felt on more monotonous occasions in counting periods of time. It was not lack of food alone that was telling on us. Lack of sleep or proper rest added to our daily increasing weakness.

At one time we came in very bright moonlight to a space of open road from which we suddenly saw for the first time during our flight the young green of a field of potatoes. They were growing in a patch of three or four acres that lay between the road and a farmhouse, where, in the strong rays of the moon, every window seemed an accusing eye.

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With the most extraordinary feeling of guilt, we came to a halt and looked at each other.

"What about seed potatoes?" Gulland asked.

"I don't know if they would be any good at this time of year," I replied.

"Anyhow, I'll try," said he.

Thereupon, feeling like the most depraved of criminals, and full in sight of the house, we fell upon our knees before the potato rows and scraped away at the earth with our sticks, till we had dug up two or three young plants. About half a dozen little potatoes rewarded our efforts, and after putting them in our pockets we carefully replanted the haulms and went on our way. Raw potato is not a digestible form of nourishment, but these had no bad effect on us. It is beyond my power to describe the taste of this delicacy; anyone who feels curious about it can try it for himself.

For our next camp a wood of trees growing deep in heather presented itself very conveniently by the side of the canal. It was a big, straggly wood and we went some way into it before we came to clumps of junipers, among which we disposed ourselves for the day. Here we managed to escape the mosquitoes and made the useful note for the future that where junipers grow the soil is too dry to be looked on favourably by these enemies of man. It was a beautifully quiet place. I was thrilled, while Gulland slept, to observe a yellow bird, unknown to me, which came and perched on a branch above him, not three feet from his head. I hardly heard a sound all day except now and then the crowing of a pheasant.

I think it was there that we divided, by tearing it in half, our only literature, my little volume of *Henry IV.*

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This gave us each something to read; and we acquired by this device our lasting intimacy with the character of Falstaff.

Next day Gulland felt very ill as the result of eating one of our scarce tins of meat on an empty stomach. The whole of the following night was a horrible time, as he had great difficulty in dragging himself along. However, in the most splendid way, he managed to keep up, and even to do a record march, for we went twenty-three kilometres before, in the early morning, we were forced to climb the side of a hill in order to find a hiding-place. He was absolutely dead beat by then, and we dropped down in some ivy, where we rested for an hour. Then I left him and went further up the hill till I found a heavenly lair in some junipers at the edge of an old quarry; going back, I fetched him up to it and we lay there all day. From here we could see for fifteen miles over the wide plain of Osnabrück to the south of us. It was interesting to notice that factory chimneys of new, or comparatively new brick, stuck up at intervals of three or four kilometres all over the landscape wherever, I suppose, there happened to be a village. To an Englishman wandering about Germany, this decentralization of its industries is almost the most striking point.

While we were still plodding along by the canal that night, we saw a light ahead, and we discovered, as we cautiously drew nearer, that it came from the stern windows of a barge. We stole past like shadows, picking our way over the mooring ropes and glancing apprehensively in as we went by at the bargee, whom we could see sitting at his ease beside the lamp, immersed in the perusal of a novelette. We were not a little

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tickled to see painted in large letters and glaringly new white paint the name of the barge, the *Moewe*, which was a pretty clear indication of Hun sympathies, if not nationality, on the part of the owner. Of course, the German papers were absolutely crammed and jammed full of the exploits of their ship of that name, and in our camp were a great many officers of the merchant service who had lately been caught by her, so we luckily knew all about her and were not in any danger of expecting to find friends aboard her freshwater namesake. Still, we might have spoken to the man before seeing the name of his craft, and we were much relieved when we had left it behind us and were safely at rest in so peaceful and deserted-looking a camp as we found by the old quarry.

About midday, however, we had a fearful shock, when a boy with a satchel on his shoulders strode down a little path some six yards to our rear. He did not see us; and his boyish fancy luckily did not bring him back from school by the same way he had gone to it; but we thought it certain he would come back and probable that several others would come with him, and in consequence we knew no rest or peace of mind till night fell once more and we stole down again to the canal to begin one of the most exhausting walks we had yet undertaken.

That stretch of tow-path had been recently constructed. It led us through a region of sandhills where at every step our feet slid backward in the shifting sand. It was something of a nightmare, but in the end we got across it and into some exceedingly damp rye in a part of the country where the soil of spongy peat looked as if it never could or did dry up.

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We were now getting within measurable distance of our goal. We had successfully left behind all the big towns that lay to left or right of our route; and such prisoners' camps as our inquiries among privates had enabled us to locate.

We had never as yet dared, when speaking to each other, to allude openly to our prospects of eventual success, having too wholesome a respect for the contrariness of the god of luck to risk provoking him by a rash display of hope. But now, at last, we began to talk freely of our chances and to say to each other: "Do you know, it's actually possible that in three days' time we may be in Holland, and free men?"

I remember Gulland saying: "What is the first thing you'll have to eat?"

"Well," I replied, "first I shall have an enormous bowl of milk. Fresh milk with crusts of delicious white bread floating on it. Perhaps there may be cream on it too."

I had visions of Holland full of cows, cheeses, butter; a land of farms and food. A fascinating vision.

Our talk also ran on the subject of the sentries who guarded the frontier. How far apart were they posted? Should we run for it, or crawl? Should we ever get through the marshes that seemed, if we could trust the indications of our map, to be thick and formidable all along the frontier? And through all these questions the ominous undercurrent of thought never ceased to run —could we do it at all on the food we had left? A couple of nights previously we had been frightened by coming to a place where a main railway crossed the canal. It was highly probable that there would be a

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guard on the bridge, so we had left our track to make quite a short detour through some boggy fields and over the railway embankment some way from the crossing, and it had been rather appalling to find ourselves kicking the tussocks of grass instead of stepping over them. I felt that to lift my foot over uneven places and holes in the ground was like stooping down to pick up something that didn't form part of me at all. It was horribly clear that no amount of will-power would enable us to run more than a hundred yards at a time.

However, on we went. On, on, on.

We were back now on our nice flat tow-path again, with one foot sliding in front of the other in a perfectly satisfactory way. There was not so much shifting sand on the track that night, and we made very fair progress, though without displaying quite the turn of speed that had been noticeable a few nights before. This was to be our last night of straight tow-path tramping, as not many miles beyond what must be our next resting-place the canal bent away to the south-west, and would lead us to the town of Rheine; whereas we intended to keep straight on to the west, using such roads or tracks as we could find. We should have to go slowly and very cautiously. Well, there was likely to be no trouble about the slowness.

That early morning found us in a very open and treeless country on the right or north bank of the canal. It was a country of small holdings and poor soil, black and peaty; the sort of soil that made you wonder how anyone could make a living out of it. We examined crop after crop of rye with a disdain that rapidly became alarm as the light grew stronger and still showed us no

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sign of a possible hiding-place. The rye grew so thinly that you could see right through its stalks to the other side of the little fields.

We were finally forced to decide on taking shelter in a patch about ten yards square of rather healthier-looking rye, growing nearly on the edge of a crop that was itself not more than an acre in extent. Into this we crept with the utmost care to disarrange as few as possible of the rye-heads; and there we laid ourselves down, much as the proverbial ostrich does when he is reduced to hiding his head in the sand, though unluckily with scarcely our fair share of the touching confidence of that optimistic bird in his scheme of camouflage.

Only four yards behind our heads ran a green farm track, crossing at that point a wide ditch with a little water trickling along the bottom of it. Here before we lay down we had replenished our drinking cups.

Very soon the farm awoke and sallied forth to the labour of the day, which luckily happened to be not very near our camp; but about ten o'clock someone rode by mounted on a cart-horse, and towering almost immediately above our heads. It was a very hot day. From noon till three in the afternoon the German small-holders found it best in that weather to stay indoors in the shade. As they did not mind rising at cock-crow and going late to bed, they could afford the time. However, at about three, Hans and Irma, having finished with their school for the day, eaten their mid-day meal and had their rest, thought it would be a good plan to spend the afternoon playing in the ditch just behind our heads.

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It was a lovely game, with lots of splashing, and shrieks of joy from Irma, till Hans showed a little too much of the Prussian spirit and began barking at her in the best Feldwebel style. Irma, whose proper bringing up had evidently begun early, took it lying down. Not so Gulland. Even in the physical sense, he could hardly be induced to remain glued to the earth on hearing the hated tones.

"Clearly the war hasn't gone on long enough yet," he murmured into my ear. "No sign of the Prussian reptile being crushed in these parts."

To this day he recalls Hans with a shudder, and feels all the more nauseated in that Hans was a bare seven years old.

The naughty little children would not go in when they were called. The whole farm resounded with the yells of their mother from the doorstep of the farmhouse, but it was, I think, the fear of their father that at last, between seven and eight in the evening, made them reluctantly give up their fascinating game. Well for us that they had found it so enthralling! A childish exploration of two yards to one side would instantly have led to our discovery.

Great as was our relief at their departure, life on the farm was not yet finished. Once more, at about nine o'clock, the horse and his owner passed us by, this time to collect a load of green forage with which to rack up the cows. Then, little by little, as dusk imperceptibly melted into darkness, all sounds diminished and died away into silence. At about eleven we stole out, and as we had strayed some way from the canal in our search for a hiding-place, it must have been midnight by the time we threaded our way among a few

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scattered houses that formed part of the village of Recke and regained the tow-path.

The heat of the day had been followed by a heavy mist in that low-lying district; it hung so densely about the canal that only with difficulty could we discern a tree forty yards away. Presently, as we were passing cautiously under a road bridge, I caught a faint sound of voices from somewhere more or less in front of us. We had advanced another twenty yards, when I, who was leading, saw dimly a shape that might be that of a man. I stopped abruptly, turned on my heel, and whispered to Gulland:

"Someone ahead of us."

"We'd better go on and bluff," he whispered back.

I agreed with him that it was the best thing to be done, and on we went, our hearts in our mouths.

To the right of the path a bank fell steeply down to a marsh, utterly dark; on the left, in spite of the fog, the water of the canal reflected a little light from the sky. I could make out now the forms of more than one man. There were people, apparently, standing on both sides of the canal, those on the opposite bank shouting to those on our side, who were busy about something in the water. They seemed to have a net, as far as I could see.

The first two were civilians, much engaged on their task.

"Guten Abend," I said as we passed them, and inattentively they returned my greeting.

We took a step forward. In another second we should have left all three of them behind; when suddenly the third man turned and looked sharply at us. With a quick movement he placed himself across our

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path, and I saw that he wore a semi-military cap, and was evidently one of the same class of half-policemen that we had encountered in Schwarmstedt village.

"Halt!" he said loudly.

The other two looked up with a sudden interest.

"Where are you going?"

My knees began to wobble. I felt like sitting down.

"Nach Lingen," I answered with as much assurance as I could produce.

The fellow gave me a hostile glance.

"Nach Holland is what *I* think," said he.

"Nein, nach Lingen," I repeated. "Warum nicht?" I added in a tone I tried to make persuasive.

Thereupon he burst into a torrent of questions, couched in language which showed very clearly his entire disbelief in our being anything but escapers. As I listened, hope fled from me. Poor Gulland, who knew no German, turned on me a look that asked plainly whether any desperate measures could be taken; but he knew as well as I did that nothing could be done. It was no good. Our goose was cooked. On either side of us the way was barred; on our left, by the canal, on our right by the swamp. Not only were we out-numbered, but on the far bank our enemies had two spare men who could quickly come to their assistance by way of the bridge. Worst of all, we had no strength to run.

I gave up the argument, which, indeed, my four words of the language scarcely qualified me to sustain; and saying in a subdued tone that I was tired, I sat rather suddenly down on the tow-path, every morsel of strength gone from me.

I had been living on hope, walking with it as with

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a crutch. Now it was gone, and I couldn't any longer even stand on my feet.

CHAPTER XI

WE STEW IN THE JUICE

After this our captors were not uncivil, but as soon as we could move, they hustled us along to the local lock-up.

A young soldier was in charge there, and he almost at once said that we must be searched.

I knew that before he said it, so having sat down on his bed in the corner up against the wall, I stealthily, when the German was not looking, pushed my compass and map down between the wall and the blanket. The German paper marks we had with us next found the same resting-place. We then stood up and were searched; after which, during a lot of jabber that followed on this ceremony, I sat down on the bed again and restored my valuables to their proper places in my pockets.

Then ensued a long wait while an escort was fetched.

In due course he arrived with a bicycle and a revolver, and marched us off after explaining that we should inevitably be shot with the aforesaid weapon if we tried to escape.

In spite of his warning we seriously thought of doing him in on the way; and I suppose we could have done so. I think he knew it, for he was not at all happy, and was very suspicious; but the real trouble

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was that we were quite incapable of making a bolt for it. As I have said, we could just slide one foot in front of the other; but we could not have squeezed up a respectable spurt, so we allowed him to push us along to our destination, a peculiarly squalid prisoners' camp, composed of huts, barbed wire, and sand, and packed with French and Russian privates.

With quick generosity one of the French pressed some biscuits on us as we were taken past them and through a guard-room to a cell communicating with it.

We were thankful that we had not been separated, although the cell was not very spacious for two people, being of the usual dimensions, that is to say, about eight feet by four feet six, and eight feet high. At one end was a small window and at the other a door.

The wall at one side was nothing but a plank partition, from behind which came groans; and, very soon, a very wormish French voice begging for cigarettes and conversation—especially conversation.

He was dying for it.

Poor devil, no wonder he felt a worm. He was doing three days of *Streng Arrest* in the dark, without one blink of light. It is a form of punishment which, if prolonged, breaks down all but the strongest wills.

He insisted on telling us why he was being punished, though we were, I am afraid, distinctly unsympathetic.

He had been working on a farm, and all the people there had made fun of him, even the *petit gars*, who had thrown dirty leaves on to his bed. This was more than he could support, so in an access of unusual braveness he had struck work. When the farmers reported him,

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he had been given this arrest, which he was taking very hard. Better to be out in the sunshine, enduring the insult of the most villainous of *petits gars*, than to be locked in this blackness, all alone with his dignity. Still, no doubt, a small Hun boy, given a free hand and no possibility of retaliation, can give most of God's creatures points when it comes to being obnoxious.

During the three days we spent in that cell we were shown a strange mixture of brutality and kindness. We were most agreeably surprised by the Feldwebel sending us a delicious meal of potatoes and hash, food that would have been considered a luxury in any camp, and bountiful quantities of it. In fact, in our starved state we ate more than was good for us.

On the other hand, on occasions when we were forced to leave our cell, one, in particular, of the guard displayed the utmost ferocity. He used carefully to take down from the back of our door, where he kept it hanging up, a large club on which was prominently carved "Gott strafe England." This he waved round and round our heads, urging us on as if we had been so many pigs, and dying for an excuse to have a clout at us with it. He was also in other ways more brutal than I can here describe.

We passed the time in playing chess; drawing a chess-board on the planks of the bed, and tearing up a newspaper into chessmen. On the third day an escort for us arrived in the shape of a corporal from Schwarmstedt camp, and without much regret we marched away to the railway station. He made us walk in front of him and kept his rifle pointed at the small of our backs as he strode behind us.

From this position he had, unfortunately, a clear

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view of my feet, and after half a mile he politely halted me.

"Sorry to trouble you," he said, "but I must ask you to hand over that money which I see sticking out between the soles of your boots."

I cursed my clumsiness, sat down on the bank, and from beneath my feet extracted a hundred marks. I had plumed myself not a little on this device, which had been suggested to me by the anxiety my lower sole was displaying to get away from the upper one. It was so loose that the points of the tiny nails that hold the pieces of leather together were all exposed. I had only had to insert the note and pinch the soles together by putting my weight on my foot in order to impale the paper on the nails, fixing it immovably, as I imagined, under my toes. I had already passed a very searching test at Recke camp, where, when we had been made to strip, I had thrown off my boots with a fine air of indifference, saying as I did so:

"I suppose you'd like to look at those to see if there's anything inside?"

The Germans had followed the suggestion and had looked inside, but had not turned the boots up. However, now, by some bad luck, the note had become loosened from the nails and had worked its way partly out.

After this episode, the corporal, a Frankfort man, was very obliging, and allowed us to buy food and a paper, which last, on being deciphered, revealed the highly pleasing fact that the British had just taken 5,000 prisoners in Wytschaete salient. We proceeded to have a pleasant journey by train, observing the country for future reference, and feasting wherever an opportunity presented itself.

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We were immensely struck by being put into the same carriage as the only lady we ever met in Germany. It was one of those long carriages such as are in use on the London Underground, and travelling in it also were several Hun officers. The lady, an old widow, was very stiff with them; she was the only German I ever saw who did not grovel to an officer.

We spent an age in the waiting-room at Hanover, a place we were to revisit more than once. I thought it less dull and unattractive than most railway waiting-rooms, because the station hotel had been converted into a big hospital, and facing us on the wall of the room hung a large indicator showing the number of beds in the hospital, and also the number that were filled at the moment, and the number still empty. I think there were more than a thousand beds, and only about twenty-five of them were free.

For the last stage of our journey we were placed in a first-class compartment by our corporal, who had all the time shown a great regard for our dignity. He was horrified at my having no hat.

Among others already comfortably ensconced in the carriage were a woman and a commercial traveller, and this pair the corporal immediately proceeded to eject in order to make room for us. This led to frenzied protests from the bagman.

"A pretty scandal," he shouted, "that verdammte English prisoners should be given seats, while good Germans have to stand in the corridor!"

"Let the woman keep her place," I urged our guard. "I will stand. It is not the custom where I come from for men to sit while women stand."

At this, not only the bagman but the lady herself

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laughed loudly with insulting and incredulous merriment.

As far as I could gather from his subsequent jibes, the opposite custom is the only one ever dreamt of in Germany.

A lady whom I know has since told me, *à propos* of this difference of manners, that before the war she was sitting in the corner seat of a railway carriage in Switzerland, when a German opened the door, got in, took her by the shoulders without a word, and lifted her out of her corner to the middle of the carriage. He then sat down in her place, and in spite of the rather heated comments of the rest of the passengers (all women), remained in it till he reached his journey's end. I have no doubt my bagman was genuinely outraged in his most tender susceptibilities by my outlandish and eccentric behaviour, which to his mind, no doubt, not only showed a stupendous power of invention, but, far more reprehensible, might put ideas into his wife's head, a place, as every son of the Fatherland knows, totally unfitted alike by nature and Kultur to contain anything of the sort. In the end the matter was compromised by our N.C.O. turning out another bagman, much to his disgust. As usual, these gentlemen were far fiercer in their ostentation of patriotism than their friends who went to the war.

We were rather weary when at the end of a long day we at last emerged from the train at Hademsdorf, one of the stations for Schwarmstedt camp.

The first person we ran into there was our prison Commandant, the stately old Hussar. It amused us to see him tuck his long legs up into a small trolley and be pushed off along the light railway by a

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Hun private. We had to walk a matter of five miles, and were rather cheered on our arrival by the expressions of encouragement and respect hurled at us by our friends as we were hustled through them to the cells.

Next day I smuggled out to the occupants of my old room a lengthy and technical description of our route and of the methods we had adopted. This has been printed in full by Mr. Harvey in his book *Comrades in Captivity.*

Gulland and I were about a week in those cells at Schwarmstedt, being cross-examined, and so on; but we were allowed to have books, and the cells were not too bad. They measured 7 feet 10 inches by 6 feet 9 inches by 9 feet 4 inches high to the eaves, with a window 2 feet by 1 foot 4 inches. Our treatment in other ways was not unreasonable.

At the end of about a week we were marched out of Schwarmstedt. We were told that we should undergo our sentence, nominally five months' detention, in another camp. Under German military law, this sentence meant, as it would under English military law, that an officer should be confined to his quarters for the time specified. In theory it should not have meant cells, or anything of the kind. After a circuitous journey we were detrained at the station of a remote little village some seventy kilometres west of Schwarmstedt and by that distance nearer to the Dutch frontier. Thence we were marched away to the camp of Ströhen Moor.

As we approached it, the barbed-wire cage, with its wooden huts dotted about the parallelogram of its enclosure, had a familiar look, as it was on much the

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same lines as Schwarmstedt, though, as we soon discovered, it was more crowded.

The officers imprisoned at Schwarmstedt had been far from smart. It was indeed impossible to be smart, on account not only of lack of materials, but also because of the dust, and from having nothing but the floor to serve the purpose of cupboard. All the same, it gave Gulland and me a shock to see that a lot of our old Gütersloh and Crefeld friends who were crowding round the gateway were attired only in sandy shirts and shorts, and looking more like a mob of savages than anything else. We were greeted with shouts of astonishment from Onslow and some other former acquaintances as they recognized us—astonishment mingled with commiseration.

"Sorry for you, old chaps, coming to this place."

"Oh, why?"

"This is a 'Straf' camp, and pretty near hell."

Thus they cheered us on.

"They'll search you to the skin before you ever come in to the camp," Onslow cried to us.

I had not expected this. I sat down on the sand outside the gate and began desperately to scrape a hole with my fingers. I slipped my compass into it while our guard was loafing about. It was a futile effort. The noise everyone was making soon produced a Hun officer from the officers' quarters, which were close to the gate, just at one side. He came out, cursing and vociferating, hurling orders to the prisoners to get away from the gateway, and instructions to the sentries to chase them away from it. It was pretty evident that during the three or four weeks the British prisoners

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had been at Ströhen they had not endeared themselves to their captors.

The Germans kept us waiting about on purpose for a long time, but at last, after a drastic search, we were passed through the gateway and conducted by a boy subaltern, who was fairly civil, to a long hut or series of huts running round three sides of an oblong. These were the cells, forty-five in number, in one of which I was condemned to spend five months.

I was led to the door, but at the sight of the quarters I was doomed to inhabit for nearly half a year I recoiled in horror.

"You are not proposing to put British officers into quarters like these?" I asked the German Lieutenant.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he answered. "Those are my orders."

The cell measured 8 feet by 6 feet 3 inches by 10 feet 2 inches high. The only window space was 16 inches by 20 inches, high up in the wall so that it was impossible to see out except by balancing on one leg on the head of the bed. It looked on to a little yard.

"I protest," said I.

"You can protest," the German remarked, "in writing, to the Commandant. But I may tell you that the Inspektor-General has been here, and has approved these actual cells for officers—prisoners of war."

I then and there took down from his dictation the form of protest proper to use, couched in ordinary respectful military language, and I subsequently wrote this out and gave it to him.

Nothing ever came of it, except that when the Dutch Embassy, much later, sent officials to inspect the camp, I put in a formal complaint.

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"Why did you not protest in writing to the Commandant?" the Dutchman asked me.

"I did, sir," I replied.

At this he turned to the German General who was sitting next to him, himself responsible for the prison. They whispered to each other for a moment, and then the Dutchman turned to me again.

"Of course, if you write a disrespectful letter of that kind, you cannot expect the German authorities to take any notice of it."

"This, sir," I began, "is the letter I wrote to the Inspektor-General, Hannover. 'Sir, I have the honour to protest against the cell in which I am confined, and which measures 200 × 250 × 310 cm., as being unsuitable for an officer prisoner of war. I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient servant.' "

But before I was half-way through, the Dutchman cut me short, and I was pushed out of the room.

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CHAPTER XII

I LOOK ON

In that cell at Ströhen I spent the next month, and was allowed neither books nor writing materials, nor any food beyond the vile and insufficient German ration; but all these things I nevertheless got, owing to the devotion of the British orderlies told off to look after the prisoners in cells.

Daily the hour of *Mittagsessen* would strike, when according to routine the orderly had to bring along a bowl of soup, push it through the hole in the door to me, and hasten on under the eye of the sentry. At the palpitating moment the cheerful Grimwood would be heard at the far end of the passage loudly whistling *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. This was our warning that each of us should "stand-to" behind his hole. Grimwood's voice would next be heard, ragging the sentry in the undefeated British way; then followed a few quick steps as soon as he had diverted the German's attention and the little sliding shutter in the door would shoot open. Forth from his naval jumper he would swiftly draw three tinned sausages screwed up in a bit of paper, and these would come flying through the spyhole, straight into your hands if you were quick at catching. A bowl of soup would follow at a more leisurely and dignified pace.

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Sometimes, instead of sausage, it might be a pat of butter. One great misfortune befell me in this connection. I had had smuggled in to me the *Oxford Book of Verse*, India paper edition; just the class of book that one can go on dipping into for weeks on end. The very same day half a pound of butter had found its way, fresh from Holland, into my cell.

Very carefully, when these two treasures of great price were not in use, I hid them in a secret recess I had employed some of my too plentiful leisure moments in constructing between the wall plate and the rafters. Thereupon occurred a spell of excessively hot and sultry weather, coinciding with a spurt of increased vigilance on the part of the Hun, and for two or three days I dared not go near my cache. When at length I did so, it was to discover that India paper is wonderfully absorbent of melted butter, and that there was nothing left, even to lick, beyond a trifle of greasy literature.

There were forty-five officers in the cells, and Able-seaman Grimwood and Private Victor Williams kept the lot of us alive. They had as busy a time of it as a pair of old birds with a nest full of hungry fledglings, and like the most devoted of parent-birds they were at it early and late; no insatiable feathered offspring were ever slaved for more assiduously. It was not always possible to supply every prisoner by the direct hole-in-the-door method, and many a time have I had a tin thrust into my hands bearing a label, "for Lieutenant So-and-So," who lived, perhaps, ten doors away. This it was my duty to take out when I had the opportunity and to hide in the lavatory, whence it would eventually be extricated by the person to whom it was con-

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signed. It was a grisly arrangement, but I have in my turn thankfully received my rations in the same way.

After about a fortnight I was allowed an hour's exercise a day in a little yard about the size of the room in which these words are written. This concession had the additional advantage that when no one was looking you could converse with the man exercising in the next yard. In this way I heard some thrilling stories of escapers.

One man, who when escaping had been caught by a schoolmaster, had had a tremendous wrestle with his captor, in which combat the schoolmaster, after being a good deal knocked about, unfortunately came out victorious. To his credit it must be added that he made no additional trouble for his prize by any complaints as to injuries received. I heard also the story of the midshipman, the sole survivor of the *Queen Mary*, and the story of the Canadian, Colquohoun, a man of gigantic length, whose arms were so long that having been caught half way through his escape and shut into a cell, he was able to reach down through the hole in the door to the keys that had been left in the keyhole by the careless daughter of the gaoler. Colquohoun then unlocked the door, let himself out, stole a bicycle and proceeded on his way. The bicycle unluckily was in very bad repair; but it was a singular example of the evil luck that dogged many escapers, that just after he had taken the machine to pieces in an empty shed, oiled each ball-bearing and put the whole concern together again, the owner of the shed should suddenly appear and turn out to be a Feldwebel on leave. On the other hand, he had a piece of good luck when,

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having laid up in a wood, a French working party was brought to the field alongside. He was able quietly to attract the attention of one of the French prisoners, with the result that they supplied him with what he entirely lacked at that moment: namely, food.

In spite of exercise in the yard and physical jerks, a month of this sort of life left most of us in a pretty flabby condition. The bed was not in itself an object to reconcile one to enforced rest, consisting, as it did, of planks nailed from side to side across the framework and surmounted by a canvas bag or palliasse stuffed with newspapers. I pulled out one and found that it was dated 1909.

Thank goodness, Lord Newton negotiated an agreement at this time at The Hague which cut down the period of detention for escape from five months to one, or thereabouts. After doing about six weeks of cells in all, I got the benefit of this, and emerged into the relative liberty of the camp. It was a blessing, but few people would have thought it so unless they had first been in solitary confinement. The camp can only be described as being thoroughly disgusting, and its sanitary arrangements as appalling. It was not long before an acute epidemic of something in the nature of dysentery ran through it. Gulland nursed me over my bout, and it was then my turn to nurse him.

In the intervals we played hockey along the sandy spaces, with a hut making one boundary. After a time, and many struggles on the question of the proper observance of parole conditions, we were allowed a few walks, which were a real joy. I began interesting myself

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in the crops and farming again. I used to persuade one old Feldwebel that we had better walk in the direction of his farm; on the way there he would talk to me. I got a lot of information out of him, including the astonishing fact that he and his forbears had for a hundred years on end grown rye on one and the same field. We would halt under the deep shade of some trees outside his farm, while he hurried in to interview the ancient he had left in charge. He came back after one of these visits in an exceedingly bad temper, both his calves having died during the morning.

I thought the system by which guards were formed of the local people so sensible an arrangement. This man was an excellent N.C.O., but no doubt he could get a lot of his own work done in his spare time. When in England in 1921 the Defence Force was formed, I was struck once more by the possibilities arising out of this plan. Private Blank obtained a week-end leave from me for the purpose of going home and "harrowing down the antlocks," and returned from it punctually on Monday morning a happier man, and in consequence a better soldier.

In other ways the administration of Ströhen camp was as bad or worse than the camp itself. The Commandant was an aged man with more than his share of an old man's inflexibility and weak obstinacy. He and his underlings were, in their inmost hearts, terrified of the prisoners. On the other hand, the morale of the prisoners was higher than in any other camp where I have been. I believe no less than thirty-five officers escaped from that place during the five months I was there. Of these, I think eight got across the frontier.

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No plan, apparently, was too foolhardy to daunt them; no ingenuity too great to be expended in finding a possible way.

The result was a state of something almost like active warfare between the two forces, and there were some nasty episodes as well as many thrilling moments.

Recently captured officers being ordered to surrender their steel helmets, they lost no time in throwing them into the fœtid pond that stagnated in the middle of the camp. After a while the Huns suspected this and began to drag the pond. One of the young prisoners, Lieutenant Knight, seeing them engaged on this task, hung about the edge of the pond and tried to get in the way and hinder their activities as best he could, whereupon they drove a bayonet through his thigh.

It was an awful wound. However, he made a most marvellous recovery, and turned the tables on the Germans at the end of two months by escaping from their custody.

The camp pigsties not being within the enclosure, it was customary for orderlies to go out daily to them with the pig-tub of refuse. One day Knight dressed himself in an orderly's uniform and helped to push out the barrow. After carefully delaying till the guard had been changed, he allowed his companion to take the barrow back into camp alone, while he himself spent the rest of the day in the salubrious environment of the pigstye with the pigs. This he made the first stage of a journey that took him straight into Holland.

One old Commandant had a perfect mania against

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the prisoners congregating close to the gate. After the evening *Appell* it was the almost universal practice to take a vigorous constitutional round the camp, and one night while this rite was in progress, a certain number of perfectly innocent officers gathered about the neighbourhood of the gateway. While they stood there it so happened that out of the officers' mess stepped the Commandant. Immediately he lost his head and began bawling.

The crowd of officers showed no particular *empressement* in moving off, and when they did depart, their places were quickly taken by others from the stream of promenaders circling round the enclosure. Without more ado the Commandant ordered out three men of the guard and instructed them, in my hearing, to bayonet any officers found near the gate.

Two of these men kept their rifles at the "slope," but the third young fiend, ambitious for cheap glory, came in from outside, carrying his weapon at the "ready," and thrust his bayonet from behind through the back of an unfortunate officer who was merely pursuing his walk and had not even heard any of the German's orders.

The bayonet missed a vital spot by about one-tenth of an inch.

Another evening the camp resounded to rifle-shots, and I rushed out of my hut to find a sentry pouring rapid fire apparently into the ground exactly in front of his toes. These bullets were going just past the head of a wretched man who was lying in a smother of sand at the end of a tunnel which had unluckily given way beneath the sentry's feet. His target was not two feet away, but he kept on missing it, till

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the tunneller was able to wriggle back out of the way.

There was another perfect fusillade one rainy night and for a short time bullets were whistling all over the place, when two fellows cut the wire and emerged into the open from a corner of our cage. They had agreed to rendezvous under a solitary birch-tree some fifty yards beyond the wire, but it is hardly surprising that the rendezvous never took place. One of the two, aged nineteen, made his way safely across the frontier.

After this we had the episode of the rubbish truck, in which Folkard, the Australian, hid himself. This truck, from time to time, when it became full, was run out of the camp on roughly laid rails to a place a hundred yards outside the wire, where the contents were dumped. On one of these journeys it carried with it, concealed by a fearsome heap of stinking old tins, the unsuspected escaper. In it for what seemed to him an eternity of time he lay buried beneath its noisome contents, doubled up in the most uncomfortable position, and waiting till night should fall.

Unluckily for him, however, a certain disgusting old sentry, known as "the jackal," on account of his habit of prying about among the refuse for scraps of fat or such-like delicacies, came off duty that evening at six o'clock. We watched him amble along to the rubbish heap, where, like a rat among garbage, he began poking about, turning over likely-looking tins with his bayonet. Presently he came to the truck and lingered by it, fingering and throwing aside one tin after another, while from behind the wire we looked on with bated breath.

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Folkard remained motionless, though with feelings that may be imagined; and you should have seen that sentry jump when he at last turned up a tin and came suddenly upon a human hand.

I don't know whether it was the fuss the Commandant made about the gate that drew Montgomery's attention to it; but perhaps the most foolhardy of all the attempts to get out was made one night, when he and five others armed themselves with a heavy baulk of wood, and taking a good run, charged the post to which the gate was fastened. They missed it by an inch; the log went through the wire and they fell in a heap almost at the feet of the sentry.

They were back in their rooms, unrecognized, in a wonderfully short time. Montgomery, indeed, was back in his cell, from which he had previously extricated himself by the simple process of unscrewing the window frame.

The sympathizers, whose part in these escapes was limited to that of lookers-on, came in for a full share of the excitement. I know few things more agonizing than watching a man cut the wire half-way between two sentries; and I've seen this done at Ströhen without one particle of cover between cutter and sentry. Unluckily, the feat had no successful result.

Personally, Ströhen defeated me. I never could think of a way to escape, at any rate not until someone else had already thought of it and established a prior claim. I once attained to the position of No. 5 in the fourth party which had a right to the bathroom floor concession. My hopes rose when the first five got safely away, and every one of them safely across the frontier.

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When you thought of it, it seemed simplicity itself. The bathroom lay outside the rectangle of the camp, and was approached by a barbed-wire passage having a locked gate at each end; but it had a window which looked out on to the open country beyond it. Baths were administered to batches of twenty to forty prisoners at a time.

The plan was to manœuvre ten or twelve naked bathers, so that by flopping their towels about between the sentry and a digging party they should form a screen. Meanwhile the escaping party quickly loosened some planks, and contrived that these should be put back again easily and in such a way that they looked neat and untouched. After a few days of this work a space between the floor joists came to light, whence, on bathing days, twice weekly, a little sand was extracted, till there was room for five men to lie in the empty space. Then one morning their packs were smuggled in, and we left them and their owners below the floor, behind locked door and gates, without the sentry having noticed our diminished numbers. That night they rose up again into the bathroom, replaced the floor in perfect order, and climbed out one by one through the window into freedom.

All of them got safely away. Number two party enlarged the hole to take a sixth, waited a fortnight, and then dug themselves in as their predecessors had done.

Meanwhile the infamous Niemeyer had arrived at the camp, having been sent for to put the fear of God into the rebellious British. He has been described several times, and it may suffice to say that he was one of the few Germans whose punishment we demanded

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after the war. He had made his début at the camp with loud asseverations that no more of us would escape while he, Niemeyer, was in charge; so that when morning *Appell* showed a deficiency of five, he began by pointing out the impossibility of anyone getting away when he was there. He then went on to suggest that we had much better tell him where the delinquents were hiding. As, oddly enough, we did not fall in with this idea, he kept us all standing on *Appell* whilst he instituted a thorough search.

The hours wore on, and he revealed himself more and more clearly as the blustering blackguard that he was. A moment came in the course of the morning when he thought he had scored, for he did discover an old and practically disused tunnel that ran beneath one of the huts. Without concealing our joy and amusement we watched the Hun soldiers sweating away with pick and shovel.

Time passed, and still we stood in our ranks in the glare of the sun.

Lunch time arrived, and protests began to be made by some of us, which Niemeyer answered by having a chair and table brought out and put down near us, the table laden with a sumptuous luncheon for himself, comprising tins recognizably stolen from our parcels. The day wore on and we became increasingly jubilant and increasingly disorderly, as their search, even when first extended to the bathroom, ended in total unproductiveness. But suddenly, at about three in the afternoon there came a startled cry from a Feldwebel who had wandered into the bathroom again. Moving aimlessly about it, he had felt a board tilt beneath his tread.

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Whether enough care had not been exercised in fitting down the board, or whether its underlayer had wriggled, I don't know; but presently there emerged six sandy and crestfallen officers, and my chance of profiting by the bathroom concession was a vanished dream.

Three or four people emerged by an extraordinary piece of bluff. They just got themselves up to look like orderlies, put their packs inside water buckets, filed up to the sentry outside the gate through which orderlies had been used to go and draw water from the well, and passed out. I forget whether it was on that occasion that a young Australian, a mere boy, named Fitzgerald, made his exit. At any rate, he did so, accompanied by another prisoner named Mott, who, with an unhealed wound still in his leg, swam the Ems and got safely across into Holland.

Fitzgerald also swam the Ems, but was chased and caught on the far side. He was brought back to the bank from which he had started, and there he shook off his captors, swam the Ems again, and was again caught, and considerably knocked about. Nevertheless, he repeated this performance a third time, but was then so roughly handled that he could do no more.

The Ems at the point where this took place is about as wide as the Thames at Oxford, I believe.

In one way Ströhen was distinguished from any other camp I was in, in that it alone among them was visited by a woman. This feminine creature was no doubt considered by the Germans to be man-proof by reason of her surpassing ugliness. The important rôle fulfilled by her was that of assistant to the dentist. In contemplating her, even the instruments of torture

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that he wielded in her presence lost some of their terrors.

No woman ever had such a chance in her life. At her feet were laid the hearts of a hundred youthful officers. Suspicious at first, but warmed gradually by the melting glances and tender language with which they assailed her, she finally began to yield, and as she yielded, disgorged maps and compasses in a plentiful shower. I am afraid that disillusion awaited her. Little by little she must have found that her admirers were not as disinterested as she hoped. Their courtships unaccountably waned as the compasses disappeared into their pockets.

Thompson, who had been Pélissier's manager in "The Follies," made the greatest theatrical hit I have ever assisted at when he appeared on our stage one night, dressed and adorned exactly to represent this damsel. Prancing on to the platform in a perfect imitation of the lady's usual gait, he began to sing: "Oh, I am the only Girl in the Camp."

Then, with a naughty waggle of his forefinger towards the typical British officer who was awaiting her at the opposite end of the stage, he continued: "But you're *not* the only boy."

Poor woman, she came to an untimely end. The Germans caught her staggering into camp under a load of compasses, which she had hidden all over her.

Altogether it was a lurid and an eventful camp. Feeling ran high, as they say at elections, and when a wangle by my father obtained for me the opportunity to leave it in the company of Gulland, Crossman and Unett, and to go to Freiburg, I was not sorry to depart for a new gaol.

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CHAPTER XIII

I BUY A BAEDEKER

In the train from Ströhen moor Crossman was a great nuisance, because he was so well known as an escaper of the deepest dye that the guards were horribly suspicious of all four of us. In vain Gulland and I made excuses to go along the corridor; we were invariably followed; and if we loitered in the neighbourhood of the platform at the end of the carriage we always found our escort's eye firmly fixed upon us just when we were on the point of jumping off on to the line.

Presently we reached Carlsruhe, where, while we were being marched across the town, Gulland kept whispering frantically in my ear: "Shall we try a bolt at the next corner?" I as frantically whispered back "No." It was probably as well that we did not, for we were about 150 miles from the frontier, instead of forty, as we fondly imagined.

In due time we arrived at Freiburg, and were decanted on to the platform. As we stood waiting there while the guard attended to our luggage, Crossman suddenly said to me:

"What about maps?"

I looked around. The bookstall was quite close.

"Yes," I answered quickly. "Come on. Let's try."

"What shall we try for?" Crossman murmured as we approached the stall. "The Rhine Valley?"

"No, the Black Forest," said I, and as we were now standing in front of the stall, I added in a louder tone, addressing the Fräulein behind it:

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"A Baedeker of the Black Forest, please."

Perhaps she thought the old tourist days had begun again, or perhaps habit was too strong for her and she reached out for the book automatically. At all events, without a word she handed us each a Baedeker, and in the twinkling of an eye we had paid for and pocketed them.

Not much did I take in of the beauties of Freiburg as we marched up through the town. My mind was too full of the question as to how I should manage to get my precious guide-book into camp without its being discovered.

However, this was not Ströhen. They were young and innocent regarding our ways here, and when we were taken into the courtyard of the prison, several British prisoners who came up out of curiosity to observe the new arrivals were allowed to hang about so that it was possible to speak to them.

I waited till I could get close to one, and then, snatching the volume from my pocket, I thrust it into his hand.

"Hide this!" I whispered.

He looked bewildered.

"Eh, what?" he stammered.

"Hide it. Get away and hide it. Quick!" I hissed at him.

Still bewildered, he nevertheless obeyed.

We were delighted to have left that filthy sandheap Ströhen, isolated in the midst of a desolate moor with its collection of tin huts. Freiburg was a welcome change to something established and substantial. It was also warmer, and showed traces of times when poison gas and high explosives were not. The spire of

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the cathedral was visible above the outer walls of the prison and belonged distinctly to that former period. It was probably a delusion to imagine that the Huns who built it were very different from those who still worshipped in its shadow the good German God.

From our prison we could not see much more of Freiburg than the cathedral spire, but at least we were spared a landscape of dust and barbed wire. The old university buildings which we occupied were built around the four sides of a rectangle, of which the front faced the street, the two sides being bounded by narrow lanes, and the rear giving on to the back yards of a row of private houses. The front of the building was taken up by the gateway, the kitchens and various offices; the left side contained the Commandant's office and quarters; the servants lived in the side opposite the entrance; and on the remaining side of the square were our rooms. They occupied two stories above the old museum and looked, all of them, upon the courtyard; the passages by which we approached them ran along the outside wall, with barred windows giving upon the narrow street or lane below. In each of these passages a sentry was posted night and day. At the corner formed by the angle of our quarters and the front wing a chapel abutted on to the building, a small place, decorated outside, where it faced the street, by a large statue of the Virgin.

I had not been there long before I heard that among the hidden treasures of Freiburg prison there was a rope. How it was obtained I don't know, nor how it was kept concealed; but I saw it, though I never used it, and it was a perfectly good rope of the kind used in Alpine climbing, and such as one might

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expect to find at a place like Freiburg, near the mountains.

It had already been used by an airman, Robinson, V.C., since dead, and a friend of his, who, having cut a hole in the wall between their passage and the chapel, let themselves down by its help on to the top of the Virgin Mary and thence to the street.

They got away, but were retaken.

Another man, a sailor called Green, was let down by this same rope from an attic over the rooms at the end opposite the chapel. He and his friends cut through their ceiling to reach the attic, where there was a window giving on to the back yard of an ironmonger, Noske by name. This man had a shed in his yard built up against our prison wall; the roof of this lean-to was directly beneath the attic window. One night Green was lowered cautiously down to it. From the roof he believed that it would be a simple matter to drop over on to the ground.

Unfortunately, he had only just loosened his hold upon the rope so that Number Two could come down it to join him, when in a window across the lane there appeared a curl-papered head belonging to a servant-girl.

No doubt she could hardly believe her eyes.

What was this "so schrecklich, so verboten, so unverschämt," balanced at this so not regulated hour of the night on the tiles of that "geehrter Mann, Herr Noske?"

With eyes bulging and with loud cries she called upon the so ever-watchful guardian of the Fatherland in the shape of the sentry who was stumping up and down the lane.

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Then ensued the typical encounter between dignity and impudence; poor Green, marooned on a steeply tilting roof not ten feet above the level of the lane, with the sentry's cold bayonet quivering in an unpleasant proximity to his ankles, being in a poor situation to give a good rendering of the rôle of impudence.

His friends above were whisking up the rope, his only means of retreat, at lightning speed, filled the while with conscious pride in their cleverness at saving not only themselves but the rope as well. The sentry meanwhile was firing question after question at him of which Green understood not one word, but which he was extremely anxious to answer in an ingratiating manner.

Luckily for the faith of some of us in human nature and the power of our own fascinations, the damsel who thus took the wind out of poor Green's sails was not the beauteous Mitzi, who lived in the house next to the ironmonger. This fair young Hun supplied a greatly felt want in the nature of a romantic feminine interest to the prisoners. Most of the more youthful ones spent a large proportion of their time in concocting plans of escape in which the assistance of devoted, not to say lovelorn, enemy maidens figured largely.

In order to hasten the moment when she should finally succumb to their distant charm, several of the subalterns used to lay offerings at her shrine in the shape of bits of chocolate, sometimes enfolded within the pages of *billets-doux*. These they hurled through the window towards the feet of the lady. Towards, I say advisedly, since not one piece in a hundred

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reached its destination, the majority falling short, or going wide of the target. Such shots as got home, Mitzi received with much show of bows and smiles; small wonder, indeed, chocolate being at that time more rare in Freiburg than refined gold. It was rather touching to hear the conversation that went on concerning her, and to see the hopes of her admirers rise and fall according to her reception of their advances.

"I believe she's taken a fancy to me!" one would exclaim triumphantly.

"I saw her reading my note," another would protest. "She seemed frightfully bucked with it!"

Mitzi would have been even more flattered than she was if she had known in how many dreams she played a part. But when it came to the reality she failed somehow to fill her place in the cast.

One officer escaped by taking the place of the orderly who wheeled a barrow to the post office for parcels. He managed, on arriving there, to shut himself behind an open door in the angle between the door and a corner of the wall, where he rapidly exchanged his uniform cap for a hat. Then, donning a mackintosh, he sallied out into the street and walked unmolested away from the town.

All might have gone well with him if he had not, after walking for several miles along the road, fallen in with a friendly person who, in the guise of sympathy, extracted a good deal more information from him than it was discreet to impart, and ended up by inviting him to put up for the night at his house nearby. He accepted gratefully, and after a good dinner betook himself to a comfortable room, where he slept

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the sleep of the just, waking next morning only in time to hold an unwilling *levée* to four policemen who were standing round his bed.

There were a good many airmen amongst us, and probably this was well known to the German air force. They had a large aerodrome not far away, and often some of them would fly over us and perform stunts round about the cathedral spire, no doubt thinking to impress their rivals and to fill them with envy. What we disliked far more, however, were the feats of the Allied pilots, who frequently paid visits to Freiburg for the purpose, as we read in the papers, of bombing the station and railway. Unluckily it happened that their bombs never fell within half a mile of the station, and did little to amuse or gratify the small colony of prisoners in the university buildings. When a raid began we were at once ordered to our respective rooms, of which mine was about the nearest to the roof. My feeling when one night a bomb exploded within twenty yards of our gate were not those of unmixed admiration for the enterprise of the Allied Air Forces; and in general the raids always rather gave us the jumps.

One of our pilots who had actually come down and been captured while on his way to take part in one of these visitations had a particular dislike for them. He always felt that retaliation was due for him and he held strongly that a bomb in the hand is worth two on the head.

After dismissing us to our rooms under the tiles, the Germans themselves invariably went down to the lowermost depths and took refuge in the stone-vaulted passage at the bottom of the house.

The raids did at least break the monotony, which

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was as a rule even more pronounced at Freiburg than at other camps. As the only open space we had access to was the gravel quadrangle, we had not the same opportunities for organizing games of various sorts as we had had elsewhere. After a while the Freiburg Athletic Society very kindly allowed us to use their ground, so we were then able to play football. We were also allowed to go for walks, and in that way learnt a little of the topography of the neighbourhood, and saw where the bridges over the river were situated.

The Black Forest comes right up to the edge of the town, and our walks generally took us into it. I observed with interest the painted marks on trees and stones by which in Germany and Switzerland paths to distant places are blazed for the guidance of pedestrians. My hoarded Baedeker also gave those marks and told me what they meant. I lived in dread of that book being discovered, as practicable hiding-places were fearfully scarce. Unlike the wooden huts that are comparatively easy to cut through and tinker with, the prison at Freiburg was solidly built of stone throughout. The sentries immediately outside our doors made it as difficult to avoid attracting attention in our rooms if we attempted anything out of the common as the bareness of the quadrangle and the fact that it was overlooked at all points did outside.

Still, though there was at least one search during the time that I was there, my precious guide-book was not discovered. The Germans were always glad to sell us in the canteens any little object that seemed likely to be thoroughly useless to us, and among other

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articles that we could therein purchase for the comfort and solace of our days were Japanese paper lanterns. It would have looked ungrateful not to have availed ourselves of this opportunity for accumulating luxuries, and we should have hated to have been thought that. So when the Germans searched my rooms it is to be hoped that the sight of the red and white lantern suspended in the middle of it, close up to the high ceiling, gave them a pleasant feeling of conscious generosity. No doubt it did; but somehow they never thought of looking inside it for a guide to the Black Forest.

Not only was I anxious to learn the lie of the land; I was also anxious to learn how to lie in the language. The Commandant, however, had a very good idea of why we wanted to know German, and said so in so many words one day when I had been asking him to grant the necessary permission.

"But how then," I inquired regretfully, "can we ever be in a position to understand your Kultur?"

He stared hard at me as if he was asking himself whether by any possibility this verdammte Englishman his leg pulling could be. Apparently he decided against this hypothesis, for he allowed us to take lessons.

A professor of the University taught us. He was professor of philology and a very learned man indeed. The trouble was that he was too learned. He yearned to descant to us upon high matters of philosophy and metaphysics, whereas we wanted to learn how to ask the way to the next village. At last, after we had been pressing him more keenly than usual for some phrase of everyday use, he said:

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"I have promised the Commandant to teach you nothing that might help you to escape."

After that interest in the German classics rather fizzled out.

Later, when I did escape, some one said to him:

"Do you think Phillimore knows enough of the language to pass as a German?"

The professor smiled a slow smile.

"I think he does not," he said emphatically.

However, it was not my German that upset our applecart on that occasion. But knowledge of German was a very important point, and I afterwards continued to work at it.

I was always turning over in my mind the possibilities of getting away, and as I noticed at the end of a back passage a place in the wall where it looked as if a window had been blocked up, I thought at first of opening it out and getting through that way. Another man and I cut a hole there one afternoon, but found that the wretches who had walled up the window had also walled up the iron bars that guarded it, and they were too solid for us to do anything with. Our attempt was not quite fruitless, though, as it came to the ears of an Australian named Morris, and led to his talking to me on the subject of escaping. After a few days he divulged to me a plan that had been maturing in his fertile brain, and we agreed to try to carry it out. Although neither of us had much hope of succeeding, we thought that even if nothing came of it there would be no harm in trying.

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CHAPTER XIV

WE ENJOY A PROLONGED CONCERT

At the back of the building at the end of the second-floor passage was a slit of a window let into the wall high up above the place where the sentry generally stood. It was possible for a man to hoist himself up with his arms for a moment when the sentry's back was turned, and so to catch a glimpse of a steep roof that abutted on to the wall below the slit. It was the same roof, I think, on which the luckless Green had been caught. Beyond it, on the right, a wall could be seen, where our building jutted out for a couple of yards and then continued at right angles, to form the wing occupied by the officers' servants, all of whom were British or French. In this corner there was a row of lavatories, shut off from the end of our passage by a door close to the sentry.

Another door nearly opposite gave access, by way of two or three steps down, to the servants' quarters; the space between the two wings was partitioned off into several lavatories, and the furthest of these was in the jutting out portion of the building whose wall could be seen through the slit of window in the passage. Morris's scheme was to break a hole through this lavatory wall and climb through it on to the roof. He thought this could be done if we could get a few hours to ourselves in which to work. That also seemed possible, so we fixed up our arrangements, and only waited till the end of the week to start operations.

Saturday came, and in the afternoon we made our

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first move, which was to upset the working of the drains in the lavatories, blocking them up with the help of empty tins that had contained provisions sent us from England. We made a pretty good job of this, and when the whole contraption was hopelessly out of action, we went to the adjutant to report the regrettable hitch and to ask him to take steps to have things put right.

We counted on the difficulty there would be to get a plumber to work before Monday morning, and as we expected, the Boches did not feel justified in disturbing the week-end leisure of an honest Baden workman for the comfort of a lot of prisoners.

They contented themselves with forbidding the use of the lavatories in question, and closing the door to them from our passage with a nail or two. This was just what we had hoped for. The other door into the north wing where the servants lived was always kept locked; but we had already stolen the key. Into that wing Morris and I furtively dived after *Appell* on the Sunday morning, that is to say at about 9.30 o'clock. We crept through the orderlies' dormitory, up the short stairs and through the door of which we had the key. Once the other side of that we had only to clamber over two or three partitions to reach the scene of our intended labours.

We moved as quietly as we could, but it seemed almost impossible that the sentry should not hear us when we got to work, separated from us, as he was, by no more than a thin wooden door. The only precaution we had been able to take was to persuade 'Gus Edwards, one of our airmen, who was something (but not much) of a musician, to take his violin into

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the passage and make a day of it there, soothing the savage breast of the sentry.

To his strains we forthwith began to ply our tools, such as they were—a fairly sharp poker which was no use to speak of, and a valuable file, about a foot long, whose best point, so to say, was not the file at all, but the spike at the end that was meant to fix into a handle.

With these we attacked the wall, one of us doing the actual house-breaking, while the other, holding his two hands joined, dishlike, below, caught the debris as it fell, and noiselessly placed it in a heap on the floor. At first all went swimmingly. The wall was lined with a surface of plaster, easy to deal with, and succumbing readily to the blandishments of the file spike. But after the surface—a matter of a couple of inches—had been removed, we came to the actual wall, which was a very different pair of shoes. It had been built in 1450, when people wished their work to outlive them, and as far as we could see it certainly looked likely to last our time. It was composed of river boulders, many of them as big as footballs; the mortar that held them was as hard as cement; and the thickness of the wall was from three to four feet.

In spite of the necessity for silence and the appalling hardness of the obstacle, we made some progress, till we came to a huge stone on which nothing seemed to have any effect. We pecked and jabbed away around it, but very little result rewarded our efforts. At length, about mid-day, Morris said he was going away to get some food and a rest, so I told him to bring me something to eat when he came back. I went on pecking away at the wall, and slowly, slowly,

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I added to the stature of the heaps on the floor. When, after an hour, Morris rejoined me, he was able to see a perceptible difference and his hopes rose accordingly. He took his place for a turn at the file, and all of a sudden rounded the corner of the boulder that for so many hours had defeated us.

After that we went ahead with renewed confidence, till at last the boulder was lifted out in triumph and gingerly lowered to the ground. The wall behind it was not easy, but so much easier, to work upon! Bricks had been used in it, and jagged stones with corners that could be grasped and shaken and tugged at. They were a welcome change from the smooth round surface of the big boulder. We worked on and on; at times despairing, at times quite optimistic as we seemed to make better progress.

Suddenly, when we had penetrated a thickness of nearly four feet, the file broke its way through the last inch of cement, and we perceived with delight that we had done the trick.

Not only that, but, as we saw immediately, instead of coming out over the steep roof of the outhouse, as we expected, we had come out under it, and inside, instead of outside. At first we were not sure whether this might not checkmate all our schemes by attracting the attention of the ironmonger who owned the place, but as we made a certain amount of noise by letting stones and rubble fall out through the opening without any untoward result, we quickly decided that there could be no one there. After all, no one was likely to be there on a Sunday.

Presently the hole was big enough to wriggle through, and Morris, trying to do so, fell out and down on

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to a large heap of packing paper in the loft, narrowly missing an open trap door that led downward. I speedily followed, and the two of us climbed down a ladder into the second loft, which was much like the first, and was also used as a warehouse by the ironmonger. From this again we descended another ladder to the ground floor, a fair-sized store.

On the way down we passed the most tempting quantities of things we were always sighing for, for escaping purposes; packets of files and things of that sort. We seriously thought of taking them back into the prison, but somehow it seemed too much like stealing, and we did not touch one of them. This made me feel very virtuous.

At the bottom there was, on one side, a large double wooden door leading to the lane, and, at the back, elaborate doors of mahogany and glass, through which we could see into the front shop. As the sentry's hut was just outside in the lane, the way through the shop was the obvious one for us to take; but though we could see that the shop was empty, and could even see the bottom of its window and the legs of people passing in the street beyond, yet all our efforts failed to open the mahogany doors, which were fastened very securely by a Yale lock. We could see, too, that there was another Yale lock on the street door. If we had managed to break our way through the first we should probably have made a good deal of noise before we could have disposed of that second lock, and should no doubt have attracted the notice of the ironmonger and his family. There seemed nothing for it but the doors to the lane, which were fastened with an iron cross-bar, turning on a pivot in the middle and falling

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into a socket at the end. There would be no difficulty about opening them. The difficulty would begin on the other side, where we could by no possibility escape the observation of the sentry. We had great hopes, however, that he might take us for two friends of Herr Noske leaving the house after spending Sunday evening with him.

Having settled our plan of action, we retreated as we had come, made our way safely back, and reached our rooms, where we told Gulland and other friends of our success. We were all much elated by the smooth manner in which everything had gone so far. After spending months in other camps in digging tunnels and making elaborate preparations, it seemed too good to be true that in a single day we had contrived to make a practicable exit from this one.

Gulland was anxious to try his luck, if we got clear away, and it was settled that he was to shut the warehouse door behind us and then to give us a good three-quarters of an hour's start before following in our tracks.

At half-past eight we smuggled our packs under our coats and went out into the yard, where we walked round and round until it seemed as if no one was looking, when we slipped into the servants' quarters and through them to our hole in the wall. A few minutes later we were all three standing, shaking with excitement, in the warehouse below.

Very slowly and carefully Morris lifted the cross-bar and opened the wooden doors. Pushing them a quarter of an inch apart, he peeped out into the lane.

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CHAPTER XV

THE HIGH-WANDERING WAY

THERE was no one in sight but the sentry, who was pacing slowly along towards his black and white striped sentry-box. It was placed facing us, on the opposite side of the narrow lane but six or seven yards further up it, between us and the main street. It was not far to the street, only the length of the building, a matter of fifty yards, and the lane was no more than four or five feet wide. On our right the lane was crossed at right angles by the back street on to which faced the ironmonger's shop and all those houses that backed on to the prison. We intended to make for that street.

The sentry reached his box, passed it, and took five or six steps towards us. Then he turned and walked slowly back to his box, where he stopped and stayed some time. It seemed ages to us, but perhaps was not very long in reality. At last he started again, this time taking a few paces in the direction of the main street and away from us.

"Now," breathed Morris. He pushed open the door, and he and I stepped into the lane.

We had arranged that as we left the warehouse I was to address a word or two in German to an imaginary host, so as to suggest the idea that we were Herr Noske's departing guests.

But when it came to the time I could not do it. My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth and I remained speechless. In silence we turned our backs to the sentry and walked, not too quickly, but as quickly as we

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dared, down the lane towards the cross street. I was tastefully attired in my best disguise of mackintosh, blue seaman's cap, and spectacles; but in spite of this I did not relish the feeling in the small of my back that came over me when I turned it to the sentry. We did not dare glance round to see what he was doing.

Just before we reached the corner, only a few steps away, we ran full tilt into a small party of German soldiers who were crossing the head of the lane at that moment. To add to our confusion, Morris made for the right-hand branch instead of for the left-hand one, as we had agreed to do. I grabbed him, and we passed safely through the soldiers, and unchallenged, turned out of the lane.

I could hardly believe in our good luck as we hurried off, and if I had looked round before we were out of sight of the prison I should have felt still more incredulous.

But perhaps we had not yet afforded enough sport to the gods, or maybe the shears of Atropos needed sharpening. At all events, we had yet some way to go before Fate tripped us up with the practised dexterity she exercised on the majority of us escapers. But her plans were hidden from us as we went forward to meet her that February evening, choosing the darker side of the roadway and dodging down the narrowest of the cross streets and alleys till we came by a series of knights' moves to the vicinity of the River Dreisam where it runs through the town.

So far so good. Several people had stared very hard at us, and as we knew the sentry must have seen us we felt fairly certain of pursuit, but as yet no one had

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attempted to stop us. The excitement of that furtive passage through the streets was beyond description. Not a passer-by glanced at us but we felt ourselves recognized for what we were; not a footstep sounded on the pavement behind us but we heard in it the step of the guard hurrying to overtake us; yet each pace we advanced was something to the good, and every moment increased our chances of getting clear away from the town.

How to cross the Dreisam was a problem, for in our walks we had made sure that one at least of the bridges was guarded. We decided to miss the first two and cross by the third; and this we did successfully.

At length we came to the end of the town. At the head of the tram-line there was a stationary train about to start on its return journey. It was full of people, but we passed it, and turned aside into the forest, which here began.

In a few seconds we were deep in its shadows—the inky black shadows of the fir-trees. Here were the first slopes of the mountains that are clothed by the Black Forest. They rise steeply above Freiburg to a height of four or five thousand feet. The Baedeker we had secured at the station bookstall gave clear directions as to the tracks that lead over them and the blazes that distinguish those tracks. There was one in particular, shown on the map by a thin red line, that the Germans call a "High-Wandering Way" and it was this that we had it in our minds to follow. It would take us up to the snowy crest of the watershed and down on the other side. We thought it hardly likely that other wanderers would be met with in mid-winter up on those frigid heights.

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It was a clear night of stars and moonshine and we could see our way pretty well, in spite of the trees. In a short time we had reached the point marked on the map as that from which the High-Wandering Way branched off from the main track, and sure enough there it was—a narrow footpath twisting under the spruces up among the rocks, and blazed visibly with its own blaze.

Here for the first time we paused, turned and wrung each other by the hand, dared at last to draw breath, and with a laugh and a gasp to gloat for a minute over our incredible good fortune.

Little more than twelve hours ago, and we had been behind lock and key. Four feet of stone wall had been interposed between us and the outside world. Yet all these precautions had not been enough to keep us in our cage. Triumph and exultation filled us; we were half wild with delight.

It was true that I had burrowed before, but after what months of preparation and through what months of toil! For how many days had I not lain flat in, and under, the mud, scooping, scratching it away inch by painful inch in an atmosphere where mere quiescence was hard enough to support! But this time there had been no tunnelling, no labour to speak of, no comparable difficulties to tackle, no months of waiting, of rising and falling hopes, of daily and hourly suspense. Hardly had the plan formed itself in our brains, scarcely had the resolve had time to harden, than it was turned into accomplished fact, and we were free men once more; free under the stars; to go north, south or west as we chose; to stretch forth our hands and touch no boundaries; to walk or to run, to sit or

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lie upon the frost-bound earth, with no one to say us nay and no guttural orders to scrape bare our fretted nerves.

We were within three nights' march of the frontier; we had an excellent map. Compared with my previous escape our supply of food seemed inexhaustible. It was small wonder that we felt elated as seldom we had felt before.

Our plan was to go over the tops of the mountains and to come down on the southern side, where Germany and Switzerland are separated by the waters of the Rhine. At only two places thereabouts does the Swiss frontier cross the river and form salients on the northern bank. The western of these salients is near Bâle, in a thickly populated district—too thickly populated on the German side for an enterprise like ours. The second point at which Switzerland crosses to the north of the Rhine is about forty kilometres, as the crow flies, up the river, and approximately south-east of Freiburg. If we were successful in getting over the range we might, by making our way eastward along its southern slopes, arrive nearly at the frontier before we had to leave the covert of the hill-side woods. At one part of the frontier the wooded glen of the Steina seemed to afford a sheltered approach to within some four or five kilometres.

Another alternative was to swim the Rhine, but as I had only seen it at Bâle, I rather thought that that was a feat beyond my powers.

On one of the walks we were allowed to take while we were at Freiburg I had talked to a friendly N.C.O., who, because he had been ill-treated and struck by his Hun officer, was willing to answer a prisoner's ques-

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tions. He told me that somewhere on the Swiss frontier, near Bâle, there was a place where it would be easy to get through because there was a break in the line of sentries, or rather, for a short way, two parallel lines instead of a single continuous one. These lines, he said, each extended a little beyond the point at which they came opposite to each other, and then left off suddenly, leaving their ends in the air.

It was thus possible to circle round the end first of one line and then, by an S-shaped movement, round the end of the other, and so cross the frontier without actually passing through any line at all.

As the ex-Feldwebel murmured this enchanting information in my ear, I listened entranced, but I could not quite catch the name of the place where he said the overlapping of the lines occurred.

"For heaven's sake!" I whispered in my best German, "write me down that name, like a good fellow!"

I thrust a pencil and paper into his hand, but at that very moment a German officer came so suddenly upon us that the N.C.O. had barely time to assume the air of patriotic ferociousness towards me usual among his kind; after which he hastily removed himself from my possibly compromising neighbourhood.

As a result I had never learned the name of that frontier village.

For the present we had found the track we were looking for, and it was in high spirits that we took the road along it and plunged deeper and deeper into the forest.

For some hours we zigzagged upwards, from time

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to time coming, at a corner, upon a rock on which the moon shone strongly enough to render visible the painted blaze. The feeling that we were pursued clung to us, nightmare fashion, and we strode up the steep paths at such a pace that we were soon tired and hot, in spite of the cold and frosty air. Our packs were heavy and I found my mackintosh a great nuisance. Presently, as hours went by, the moon sank, and in the dark we missed the blazes and lost the track. We must have strayed far to the east, for coming out all at once on to a shoulder of the mountain, we saw below us the lights of Oberried and several other villages, dotted along the foot of the hills.

This dismayed me, as it showed that we had left the path, but there was nothing for it but to keep on as best we could, and we thought that if we kept to the principle of climbing ever higher and higher we could not go seriously wrong.

Up we went; up, up. By the time we came to the snow the night had grown very dark, but the reflected light from the ground helped us after that. We came out again into an upland valley, and had stopped to see if we could locate it at all, when we suddenly noticed a lot of lights advancing towards us.

They were at irregular intervals and heights and were coming on at a rapid pace.

"It's men on skis!" Morris exclaimed after gazing at them for a moment.

"It must be," I agreed. "They're after us."

Our tracks in the snow were as plain as if an army had passed. What to do we had no idea. It looked as if the game was up; but we weren't going to wait to be taken, so with one accord we turned from the path

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and broke into the forest, going straight up the mountain-side under the fir-trees.

As steep as a house it was. How we got up it I hardly know; but on hands and feet, climbing and stumbling, pulling ourselves up by the roots of the trees, or hoisting ourselves painfully over the rocks, we went on, up and ever up. I trod continually on the edge of my mackintosh and my pack got heavier and heavier. Also I was very hot.

Somehow, driven by the memory of the lights of the skiers, we struggled to the top and came out at last on a broad white track that was probably a road, but was so deep in snow that we could hardly cross it. We followed the course of it for a little way, and were led by it to a wide patch of flat ground, swept by the wind till it was practically clear of snow. It was the very top of the mountain, and in the midst of it stood an object which to our astonished eyes appeared to be a table.

It was a table. I looked around, thinking to see an inn or house of refreshment of some kind to which it might belong. But there was nothing there. Nothing but the loneliness of the forest and the black, rock-paved patch of ground surrounded by untrodden snow. It seemed like the banqueting hall of the four winds, but though their voices still howled and raged about the little plateau, the feast was apparently at an end; at all events the table was bare.

So at least we thought till we went close to it and looked down at its surface. It was, I think, of metal, and on it lines were incised, radiating to different points of a circle, to direct the wanderers on those heights and to act as a signpost on a large scale.

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It would have been very useful to us if we could have read the names inscribed at the ends of the lines; but we could not make them out at all, and so had to trust to our compasses, and to make the best guess we could as to which path to take.

Thus it happened that we turned too much to the west here, and so went a long way out of our way.

We had gone far downhill before we found this out, and annoying though it was to have missed our road, it seemed to us that we had shaken off the pursuit. By this time it was six o'clock in the morning; dawn was at hand, and we thought the best thing we could do would be to go a little further till we were below the snowline and then find a place where we could lie up for the day. On we went accordingly, and soon we were out of the snow and could turn aside without fear of leaving a plain track to betray us. We left the path and plunged down the mountain-side till we found some cover thick enough to conceal us. It was not too good, but we thought it would do. There, having eaten, we lay upon the soaking ground and slept for most of the day.

That evening we started again about six o clock, retraced our steps for a mile or so without meeting anyone, and then ran straight into a man who was coming in the opposite direction.

"Guten Abend," I said, summoning all my courage as he passed. But he went by us without a word, We followed a road that led southward, until just as night fell we came out on a high bare tableland, and the road became invisible. We kept to what we supposed to be the track, but snow was everywhere and the road,

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being flat, seemed to be more deeply covered by it than the surrounding country. There were no trees on that tableland, and though the Germans had thoughtfully placed posts here and there for the guidance of travellers, the only time we were sure we were on the road was when we fell into the drifts that lay on it. There we waded up to our armpits till we climbed the side once more. To make matters worse, a driving blizzard of thin snowflakes now began; it took what little light was left from the sky and left us literally to feel our way along.

After a time we came to a house—one of the wooden buildings, half barn, half chalet, that one finds all over the Alps and their foot-hills—and near it we met a little girl, who ought to have been in bed at that hour. She appeared to be more frightened of us, if possible, than we were of her, and ran away as soon as she saw us. I called out after her to ask if we were right for Todtnau, and she waved vaguely over her shoulder before she vanished.

It was a nasty situation, and our chances soon looked as black as the night, but by some miracle we crossed the open plateau without losing the track, and reached the woods again, where the road showed up pretty plainly.

As we went downward the snow became less deep, and at last we were below it again; at the same time the weather cleared, and the moon came out and lit everything up, now that we did not want it. It certainly was very beautiful, looking down the valley towards Todtnau—all the country shining and sparkling whitely under the moonbeams; except for the dark blueness overhead the whole scene was like an etching in black

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and white. It was so lovely that we had to stop to admire it more than once.

We were in some doubt whether to go on to Todtnau or not. We were anxious to avoid the villages, but at the same time our experience in the blizzard and the drifts of the mountain slopes made us very reluctant to expose ourselves to more of that sort of thing. We decided to go on, and on we went.

We were nearly through Todtnau when we met a man. Any meeting with any man always threw us into a state of panic, but the way this one looked at us set my teeth chattering. I put on a bold front, however, and said to him:

"Which is the road to Basel?"

To my surprise, for I felt as good as arrested, he pointed out the road, and we lost no time in taking it. But he, or at any rate, a man of some sort, followed us. He followed us for mile after mile. We strode down that road at about six miles an hour, but whenever we glanced round, there he was, striding behind us.

At last, after hours, we shook him off.

We turned east again, and passing a lot of buildings that we thought were barns, began to wonder if we could not get into one of them and sleep there. Unluckily it is the local custom to combine barn with dwelling, the family usually living above the barn, and each time we approached one of the buildings we saw that it was of the prevalent description. At last we found one that seemed all outhouse of some kind; we dived into the blackness beneath it and stumbled on to a ladder leading to a loft. Up this we clambered, as quietly as we could, but making a sufficiency of noise for all that, as how could we fail to do on wooden

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steps in the darkness? I had reached the loft and was feeling about for a place to lie down when I heard someone moving about, and a voice, separated from me only by a wooden partition, uttered a sound that was very like an oath. Another voice answered it, and I could hear a man apparently tumbling out of bed and getting into his clothes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SNOW FALLS

It was no place for us. Very quickly we dropped to the bottom of the ladder again and made off as fast as we could.

We gave up the attempt to take shelter in a barn after this experience, and presently found a place off the road and some little way up the hill-side, where firs and a rocky hillock seemed enough to shelter us. We were both so tired and cold that we decided to risk making a fire, which would not be likely to show up now, as it was very late and day was at hand.

Every piece of wood we could discover, every stick or scrap of bark, was dripping with moisture and permeated with it; but Morris, although so far from his native gum-tree, the virtues of whose stringy bark for fire lighting are sung by Australian bards, was a perfect magician with the soppy products of this German forest.

Sticks shining with the wet burst into flame at his touch; logs from which the water poured as from

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sponges he coaxed till they burnt merrily, sheltered from above by a great rock under whose side we crouched. In the meanwhile I piled more rocks one upon another to form a wall or sort of kraal around us, and soon we were enclosed to some extent, and warmed and partially dried at our own fireside. Steam rose from our clothes; smoke from our pipes. The faint haze that enveloped us gradually took on a rosy hue as the fire dried and warmed us out of our former discomfort and wretchedness.

We kept our fire going all day, and gradually became thoroughly warmed up and began to feel stronger, more hopeful, and more full of energy and determination than we had felt at any time since we started. By the evening I was completely rested, and I asked Morris whether he felt prepared to make a long night of it and perhaps get quite close to the frontier in one stage. I wanted to reach some wooded slopes near Birkendorf, and knew I should have no peace of mind till we got to them.

Morris answered that he was ready for the march, and as I did not realize that he was not nearly so well rested as I was, we started off in high spirits.

For ten kilometres or more we followed a road that led at first north-east and over high ground, and then more directly east and south-eastward towards St. Blasien. We were just through a village called Bernau, when all of a sudden, at about midnight, we saw four men coming down the hill to cut us off. They were oldish men, round about sixty years of age for the most part, I should think, and goodness knows what they were doing at that hour of the night on the wild hill-side; but unfortunately they looked able to make

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a better guess at the reasons for our presence there than we could at theirs.

"What are you doing here?" they asked us; and I was able to make only some idiotic reply to the effect that we were walking to St. Blasien.

I could see that they would have liked to take us into custody, but perhaps our size and youth—as I have said, they themselves were old men—deterred them. No doubt they did not like the look of us. At any rate they left us alone.

So far so good, but I knew the German plan too well to doubt that their tactics would be to hurry back to Bernau Dorf and telephone down the road to give warning of our approach. We should be stopped and arrested at the entrance to St. Blasien.

"We must take to the mountain again," I said to Morris; and he assented.

Leading the way where the road turns right-handed towards St. Blasien, I turned off and started up the side of the mountain by an uncommonly steep path, at a tearing pace. Up and up we went; on the steep gradient the six inches of snow slipped under our feet at each step. It was gruelling work, and Morris could only keep up with me by an evident effort. Keep up he did, but the strain was too much for him, and when at last I noticed his condition, he was about done. I had made the mistake, somehow, of imagining that of us two he was the stronger and more fit; and in some ways no doubt he was, but this was not the sort of thing he was accustomed to.

When I spoke to him presently, after he had dragged himself up a couple of thousand feet of the mountain-side and dropped himself down it again on

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the further slope, he answered me at random or not at all, and I saw that something was very seriously wrong with him. We were in the snow again by that time, and it was no good trying to camp there, so I did my best to encourage him. We continued along a road that led us past Seebrück and on beyond, till at length we could turn downhill into the woods that lie above Grafenhausen.

Here, about six o'clock in the morning, we fell down under some firs. Morris lay where he fell, but after a short rest, I busied myself collecting sticks and odds and ends of wood for a fire, meaning to warm some water and Bovril tablets with which to try to revive him. Unluckily, I had not his skill in making wet tinder burn, and do what I would I could not make the wretched thing catch fire. In vain I arranged and rearranged my pieces of fuel; in pyramids, in faggots, in the most complicated attempts at lattice work; nothing would please them: the application of a match was greeted by contemptuous sizzling, and if I succeeded for a moment in creating a tiny conflagration with a stick or two of a more obliging disposition than the rest, it was only to see it die away in faint and discouraging hisses for lack of timely support.

I had been engaged in this unequal struggle for about an hour when Morris opened his eyes. For some time he lay watching me, but after a while I suppose the sight of the hash I was making of things became more than he could bear. At any rate, he rose without a word and came over to the place where I knelt vainly fumbling.

What spells he cast upon it then I know not. I only know that he laid a finger upon my heap of oozing

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firewood, and lo! where a moment before had been nothing but black and dripping sticks, behold now, dancing flames and boiling soup.

Then he lay down again.

It was not till weeks later that he told me how he had completely lost all sense of reality during that night's march of over fifty kilometres. Exhaustion had made him wander in his mind even more thoroughly than in his legs, and throughout the second half of the night he had had but one idea—that I was a London policeman, and that he must go with me wherever I took him.

Barely had we swallowed the soup, when the sound of voices reached us, and we saw a little way off through the trees a party of Russian prisoners preparing to chop wood in the forest. Again I had to drag Morris onward, till we found another place about a mile further on that looked safe. There we threw ourselves down again in another patch of young firs.

It was a wretched spot to try to find rest in. The slope of the hill was so steep that only by wedging our backs against one tree and sticking our feet against another could we prevent ourselves from slipping down it. All day a thin snow fell, and we were beset by the dread of being discovered either by the Russians and their guard or by other woodmen. When evening came I discussed our next step with Morris, who seemed to have become normal again, but whose condition still filled me with anxiety.

We could easily have made our dash for the frontier that night, as far as the distance was concerned; the place we were aiming at was not more than five or six miles away. But it seemed to me that it would be better

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to wait another twenty-four hours. That would give time for Morris to recover, and the next day we could creep out of the woods and do some scouting as a preliminary to our great attempt.

We decided therefore to go that night only so far as the woods continued to afford us cover; and accordingly we made a very short march of it, and stopped before the trees came to an end on the slopes above the Steina.

At the first sign of approaching dawn we stole out from the sheltering fringes of the forest and looked eagerly about us. The slopes in front of us formed a kind of basin of cultivated ground. We stole out to the top of the nearest hill, driving in, as we went, the amazed roe-deer; they obviously thought it unfair that their night's feed on the juicy grass should be broken into at such an early hour.

On this hill was a signpost—the very clue we wanted. It pointed in one direction to Bettmaringen, and this we supposed was the little village we could see in front of us. But somehow or other I fancy that signpost was our undoing. Either I was careless in my survey—it had always been Gulland who had read the innermost meaning into local clues on my former trip—or the prison legend that the Germans deliberately falsified the signposts near the frontier was a true one. Morris never uttered a word of blame, but I am convinced that I put Bettmaringen in the wrong place that morning.

"You see that hill to our right front?" I said. "Take a very good look at it so that we can't go wrong tonight. I reckon that if we can find our way up its side, then along its back south-east for about three kilo-

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metres, we shall strike the top edge and the wood we want."

Morris forthwith printed the shape of that hill in his mind's eye, and I did the same. It was like a chalk down in Berkshire, with a cart-track sloping up it, and an odd tree or two on the edge of the track at one point.

"We'd better go for those trees," Morris said, "and then we shall know where we are; and we must be careful not to edge away to the right, or we shall drop into Ober Mettingen, and that's too near the frontier to be safe from guards."

It did seem that we could not go wrong. Once at the wood of our dreams we had only to follow the edge of it, or drop down through it, for it was on the southern slope of the hills; we then should be on the road where, no doubt, the frontier sentries paced to and fro.

I could, and still can, see in my mind's eye the muffled forms of those sentries moving through the snowy night; their little huts at most a few hundred yards apart. I could imagine their reluctance to prolong their beat outside those huts for more than the bare minimum required by "Heilige Pflicht." I could and still can see the crouching figures of Morris and myself waiting our moment to slip across that road, crawl over the railway, and drop into the fast-running Wutach. A few desperate heaves, possibly a few desperate strokes through its icy water, perhaps a few hasty bullets as we clambered out over the rocks at the far side—and then—Switzerland and freedom.

We stole back to the friendly fir-trees just as the morning air began to carry to us the first awakening sounds of village life, and had dived into the thickest

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patch of young firs we could find, when suddenly in that very thicket we heard the crash of a rapidly moving body. Had the watchers been watched? Was the Hun so early afoot? A few breathless moments, and then a fine ruddy roe-buck shot across a little opening twenty yards to our front.

"Good," we said to each other, "the place where a deer lies up for the day cannot be often disturbed."

That day we lay quiet and gloated over the morrow. It had not snowed for some twelve hours, but about four o'clock the light driving snow began again. We cursed, and cursed again. The snow might help us with the sentries, but well we knew by now how hard it made the task of the path-finder.

Six o'clock saw us at the edge of the wood, gazing through an ever-thickening veil of snow at that open down. At seven o'clock it was dark.

Up with the packs, out with the compass, and forward!

CHAPTER XVII

THE SNOW STILL FALLS

The snow drove blindingly in our faces as we moved out into the cultivated basin before us. The winter night had fallen with even more suddenness than usual, and we could see almost nothing. There was a little brook that ran between us and the cart-track on the down, and we wandered some way along it, trying to find a place narrow enough to jump across; but we ended by splashing through. It was

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now so dark that we ran right against the bank at the edge of the down before we could locate it. With great difficulty we found the cart-track, and foot by foot made our way up it till we reached the top. There we stopped and struck a match, by whose light we proceeded to consult the compass.

But here a fearful blow awaited us. The compass, a home-made affair of paper and a magnetized needle, refused to work. Sodden by the snow, the paper was no better than pulp, and crumpled bits of it jammed the needle. If we took out the paper we could not see the needle in the dark. One way and another it was useless.

"Have you any idea which way we ought to go?" I asked Morris, rather wildly.

"Oh, I don't know!" he answered. He was shivering with the cold, and looked as if his faculties could not work. I was pretty buzzy in the head myself from the snow and fatigue. We discussed which way to go for some minutes, then in rather an aimless fashion we wandered on.

The night was as silent as though we had been alone upon the earth's surface. Our tired feet trod the white fields without making a sound, and our track must have been obliterated behind us in a few minutes. Sometimes the dim shape of a tree showed vaguely against the sky, and instinctively we would make for it; but for the most part we could see nothing—scarcely even the snowflakes that fluttered against us, noiselessly, interminably. They flickered across our faces like the icy fingers of some malign giant who found sport in our bewilderment.

As we stumbled blindly forward, groping along with

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hope sinking and our hearts freezing in our frozen bodies, I grew more and more anxious about my companion. He returned fewer and fewer answers to my remarks; the cold seemed to take the life from him as it takes it from a plant that is struck by the frost.

Still we went on, till suddenly we found ourselves on a road. Absolutely at a loss, we meandered a little way along it, and then back again in the opposite direction. At last we came to the beginning of a snow-buried village.

We stood there, I remember, in a half dazed, stupid sort of state, and began to discuss again what to do. There was no sign by which we could guess what place we had come to; the village had no business to be there at all if we were anywhere near where we thought we possibly might be.

"Look here," Morris said. "I'd better give myself up, I'm only in your way."

I didn't know what to do. I hated to let him be retaken at this eleventh hour; at the same time I knew he was absolutely done, and his symptoms on our previous march had frightened me. I knew of several fellows who, while escaping, had crocked up owing to some such hardships as we had had to endure, and who had after their recapture been very seriously ill. I was afraid that this was going to be the sequel in Morris's case also. On the whole I thought that it was hopeless for him to try to struggle further. He was totally unfit to make new efforts.

As for myself, there was nothing much wrong with me, and it did not seem as if I could give up so near the frontier. If I left Morris in the village he ought to be all right when warmed and dried.

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"Very well," I said after some discussion. "Give me a quarter of a mile's start and they'll never find me. Don't say you have had a companion. I don't think you're fit to come further; but I will have a try."

So, reluctantly, we parted. Half a dozen steps, and we had lost sight of each other.

Poor Morris, left alone, worried himself dreadfully over the idea that his capture might lead to mine. I suppose he reflected that it must be known that we had escaped together, and that when he was taken the Germans would naturally conclude that I should not be far away. He felt that whatever happened to him he could not and would not act in a way which might conceivably indicate my whereabouts. Spurred by this unselfish thought, he somehow or other managed to drag himself three miles further till he came to another village. There, having shot his bolt, he was obliged to give himself up.

It was a frontier village, and if he had only known it, the far end of the street was in Switzerland. On such a night he might even have walked straight past the sentries, unseen and unheard.

On leaving Morris I went off across some fields. Of course, I was quite wrong to leave the first village, once we had struck it, without at all costs discovering its name and so making sure where we were. But by this time my wits were nothing to boast of. Though not as beat as Morris, my intellect was not at its brightest. I was possessed by the idiotic idea, not seldom cherished by people who are hopelessly lost, that I had a sort of sense or instinct as to which was the right direction. For an hour or two I must have wandered to and fro and round and round on comparatively flat ground.

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But getting no nearer any clue to my whereabouts, I thought to myself, "I know I'm on a plateau. The river Wutach, which is here the frontier, must be below me. I can't go wrong if I go downhill." And as the ground was dropping fairly steeply beneath my feet, I continued on my way with increased confidence. Almost at once I came to the edge of a thick wood of firs, into which I broke a passage through a rather stiff fence. I had a wild hope that this was the wood above the frontier for which we had aimed. Progress was slow in the wood. I had to push, and sometimes to crawl, through very thick underwood all bowed down with heavy snow, which soaked me through and through. Before I was half way down the steep hill to whose side the trees clung so closely, I could hear the roar of water below me; as I crept nearer to the sound it stopped snowing. Down, down I went, the noise of the river getting louder and louder, till at last I was at the bottom and gazing out from the shelter of the lowest trees upon a scene that thrilled me with a sense of hopes fulfilled.

In front of me ran a river; on the far side of the water was a road, and beyond that I could make out the level line of a railway embankment. All was exactly as I had pictured it. River, road and railway were all shown on the map of the part of the frontier we had chosen as the best after so much thought and deliberation. Apparently I had accidentally hit on the exact spot. I could hardly believe my luck. To add to it, I saw, through the rapidly clearing night, that just opposite to me a culvert pierced the embankment of the line; through it a little brook trickled out into the main river.

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I had always intended to seek out such a brook. If I could follow its bed it would afford good protection against any bullets let off at me by the sentries on this side. Besides, it was essential to follow some track up the hill or I might get diverted again into German territory.

The sight of all this, the extreme nearness of safety, the thought that nothing but those few yards separated me from Switzerland and freedom, combined with my fatigue and the snow and the general exhaustion and discouragement that I had been feeling to spur me on, and to make me forget what caution and ordinary prudence I had left.

I dashed out of the wood and jumped into the river.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SNOW HAS THE BEST OF IT

I FOUND myself immediately nearly up to my thighs in the water.

The current was swift; I was able to force myself across it only at a slow pace. Sideways, and twisting and turning my body as necessity prompted, I edged my way across, expecting at every instant to feel a bullet in my back and to hear the report of the sentry's rifle.

But nothing happened. At last, after fewer minutes, no doubt, than they seemed to me, I broke through some thin ice that had formed on the farther side,

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clambered out of the river bed, crossed the road and dropped into the little stream beyond.

On hands and knees I dived under the culvert, and there drew breath a moment, listening with all my ears for any sound of stir outside. But all was still and I climbed on. Through the culvert; out, and up the brook; till I had crept from ledge to ledge up the high stone steps over which the little stream tumbled to join the big one. Stealthily I crawled, up and up, till I was far above, and out of shot, as I hoped, of any bullet. Then I paused, panting, and listening, in spite of my success, for the sound of pursuit.

But still I heard none. All around was silence, not a twig snapped; not a bird rustled in the bushes. From time to time a patch of snow slid with a soft thud from some branch to the ground; far below the river clattered and roared. But I could distinguish no other sound. I believe I must have laughed out loud, there, all alone in the darkness.

"I declare I've done it!" I exclaimed to myself.

The absence of Morris was the one thought that took the edge off my triumph.

Then, for the first time, a doubt seized me. Could I have made a mistake?

Was it after all the right place? Had the road and the railway, on the map, not been marked on the German side of the Wutach, except in one place only?

One of our troubles had been that we had no electric torch. Neither Morris nor I had anything but a box of matches. I had very few left now, and they were wet and probably useless.

I took out the box. There was just one match dry enough to strike; with infinite precautions I struck it,

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and by its light examined the map. At once I saw that the one point where the railway and road were on the Swiss side of the river was too far away for me to have yet reached it by any possibility whatever.

The match burnt my fingers and went out. . . .

The disappointment was crushing. For a little while I sat where I was, numbed in mind, as in body; then, urged onward as much by the cold and discomfort of my dripping state, as by any other motive, I heaved myself up and moved heavily away from the brook into a small Alpine meadow.

Beyond the meadow were more fields lining the little valley of the brook I had left. I crossed two or three of them and came to an upland road steeply climbing the sides of the slope. Some way up it, a large chalet loomed darkly. As I drew near to it, there was a scuffle and the rattle of a chain, and out of the shadows at the foot of the building a gigantic dog hurled itself at me, barking uproariously. It made noise enough to rouse a necropolis, but I was too indifferent to care.

The water that still streamed from me was so cold that I expected at every moment to feel it turn into a stiff coating of ice. I believed that a night in the open in such a condition would be one from which, if I slept, I should never wake. I took no notice of the dog, but having peered into the darkness until I had found a door, I knocked loudly upon its panels.

Nothing happened, and I knocked again. I waited impatiently, but no sign of life came from within. Desperate, I fell again upon the door, and banged and hammered at it till it seemed as if between me and the dog sleep must be pretty well banished from those

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mountains. If any life existed under that roof, it must rouse itself.

At last I heard a sort of mumble high above my head, and stepping back, I looked up.

From a break in the clouds that scudded across the sky, the moon had suddenly shone out. It showed up every detail of the winter scene; the snow, reflecting its light, made everything as clear as day.

High up in the wall was a solitary window, or rather a sort of loophole, innocent of glass but formidably crossed by four stout bars of iron. Out of one corner of it I saw thrust forth an enormous yellow fang. Round the fang I then discovered the wizened face of an ancient, ancient woman. But this merely acted as a sort of frame to her principal feature.

I said: "I am lost."

She did not appear to understand, but presently mumbled out:

"Who are you?"

No doubt, I looked like nothing on earth; a hulking, unshaven figure, with wet clothes clinging to it in places, and in places hanging in misshapen lumps over bulging pockets.

"I am lost," I repeated, and to me, at least, the statement sounded full of pathos. "I am lost," I repeated. "Can't I come in?"

She understood me this time and vigorously shook her head.

"Is there no man here?" I asked.

"Yes, there is mine."

"Fetch him," I urged.

She laughed shrilly. "Do you think it's likely that I'm going to fetch my man out of bed to speak to *you*?"

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I saw I must take all risks. And yet what could I do? In a furious voice I shouted at her:

"Are you going to leave me to die in the cold, wet through as I am?"

Apparently those were precisely her views. She made no reply, unless I was right in thinking I had heard a faint chuckle.

"Where am I?" I demanded.

No answer from above.

"Am I in Switzerland?" I asked desperately.

A cunning look came into the old apple of a face.

"Nay, nay," she mumbled. She pointed up the road and I caught one more word which I thought was Uehlingen.

I cursed and turned away.

Not Switzerland! My last hope had vanished. Heaven knew where I was! I was all wrong anyhow. If I was really near Uehlingen that was all wrong.

At all events the one essential thing now was shelter of some sort. Miserably I wandered on, and came presently to a cross-road. There was a signpost at it, and I could make out the word Uehlingen painted on it.

Uehlingen! I tried to remember what I knew about it. It was a small town, I thought, where there was a factory of cuckoo clocks. I have hated cuckoos ever since. Anyhow, it was no use, except that I thought it was on my map, but I continued along the road towards it. At last I began to see buildings in the distance. It was evidently a village of some sort. As I approached, suddenly there loomed up in front of me a large Dutch barn with a roof of galvanized iron; a thing I had never before seen in Germany. It stood

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alone in a field, making a very large and dark blot on the white landscape.

As I caught sight of it, snow began to fall again.

"This is a mercy!" thought I. "This barn will be all right."

It was full of hay and rye straw. I dug my toes into the side, wedged myself against one of the posts, and climbed up. At the top I found that the further end was packed nearly up to the roof, and at that end there was no more than a light sprinkling of snow on the rye.

My first act was to get out of my mackintosh. Then I dug, dug, dug, till I had made a hole long enough for my body. I shall never forget the delicious sensation of slightly increased warmth as, bunch by bunch, I burrowed out the rye and insinuated myself further and further beneath it. At last I was completely covered by about three feet of straw and hay.

Then, lying there at full length, I took off all my clothes. One by one I managed to get off every single thing. Oh, the lovely feel of the dry covering after my soaked and icy garments! I took handfuls of hay and filled my socks, and stuffed it into the sleeves of my shirt and coat and every possible part of my clothing, in the hope that it would absorb some of the wet.

Then I ate a slight meal, and began to feel drowsy.

Delightful to lie still and become gradually warm and still warmer.

Warm . . . Dry.

I slept.

For hours I slept like a log.

When I awoke the day was half gone. I felt much

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refreshed. I got out the map and studied it. I soon saw what had happened. On leaving Morris I must have wandered round and round for miles, losing all sense of direction; and the river I had crossed had been, not the Wutach, but the Steina. Not only that, but I had crossed it in the wrong direction. Having already crossed its head waters days before, with Morris, I was now back to the west of it again, but beyond having wasted twenty-four hours in exhausting and discouraging mistakes I was not in a much worse position than before, and had still a chance. Carefully tracing a course on the map, I decided on my next move. When night fell I would start again. Once more in my breast hope began to rise.

I came to the conclusion that the greater part of the night's march must be made by road. I must have the help of the signposts. It was risky, but necessary in this weather.

About four o'clock, the snow, which had not thought it necessary to fall while I was under cover, began again with renewed energy. It swept in a blinding whirl about the barn and soon blotted out what daylight was left.

It was a miserable specimen of humanity who, as soon as it had grown dark, gingerly put on the clothes that in spite of hay stuffing had failed to dry, and crawled out of the straw.

I was not really rested by my sleep there. The food I had, consisting as it did of a Bovril tablet and chocolate, was not too plentiful, nor perhaps peculiarly well suited to restore strength to the exhausted; the warmth of the straw was more comparative than positive; now my wet clothing clung to me horribly, the snow that

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fell upon me was no colder, the wind that carried it pierced my spine like an icy knife. I felt almost too tired to move, but it was a good night for dodging sentries, and off I started.

The first thing I had to dodge was the local bus, or carrier, from Waldshut. I hid behind the corner of a house while it went by, and walked on, practically into Uehlingen before I could be sure of the road. I can't remember very clearly much that happened that night, but I have an idea that I passed through two or three villages.

I recollect coming to one signpost. It was just too high for me to read. There was snow clinging to it too, and hiding the letters. I tried to scale the post, but it was a thin pole of iron and too slippery. I had noticed, a hundred yards further back, a long ladder lying by a rick, the sort that in England is called a forty-rung ladder. Painfully I dragged myself back to the rick and fetched the ladder. It was, of course, far too long, but I propped it at an acute angle with the ground, and crawled along it from the other side of the road till I reached the top of the signpost. The name I found to be Unter Mettingen. I crawled down the ladder and carried it back to the rick. It was very heavy, and I was very beat.

I walked on again, I walked for ages and ages. All the time the snow kept silently falling, and at each step it became deeper. I reached Unter Mettingen and passed through it. The inhabitants, like wise people, were not on view. No doubt they crouched behind their shuttered windows as near the stove as possible; or perhaps were already snuggling beneath their *Decken*.

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Through Unter Mettingen, and up the steep hill on the other side.

I was going very weak now. It was a great effort to put one foot in front of the other; how I got up the hill I don't know. The snow was so thick, and I was so weak, and muzzy in the head with it all.

I looked about me for shelter. I thought I must try to find another barn and rest again, though only two more villages lay between me and the frontier and I was on the right road now. But I could see no place that looked safe, so up I staggered, to and fro along the steep zigzags of the road. On either side were orchards with trees methodically planted in rows about the width of a rood apart, and soon I began to doubt whether I was still on the track or whether I had not strayed off into one of the orchards. There were no fences, and several times I scraped away the snow from the ground, so that I could tell by the feel of its surface whether I had wandered or not. It was a painful business, this groping about over the ice-bound earth, stooping anxiously over the little hollows I had scraped in the snow, patting and fingering them in the attempt to extract the information I wanted. It was not long before my hands became too numb to differentiate between macadam and grass. I could no longer tell what I was touching, but I was pretty sure I was off the road. I meandered about, trying to find it again, but do what I would I could not make certain where it ran.

A spasm of weakness seized me. I said to myself:

"That last shed in the village looked possible. I'm not fit to make a run for it to-night, anyway. I shall go back and have a try for that shed."

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So back I tottered down the hill, and found the road again near the bottom, where it was more obvious. The last shed was just on the fringe of the village.

It was a wooden barn, and it stood in a little dip in the ground quite near a large, substantial-looking chalet. It was a very risky place, but I was past caution, though now the snow was falling less heavily.

I fumbled my way round the shed in search of a means by which to enter, and presently came to a door with a latch.

I lifted it and let myself in. Inside a disappointment awaited me. There was not a vestige of hay or straw in the place. It was full of wood, apparently larch poles, piled upon each other in loose heaps that rocked under my hand when I touched them.

I shuffled about over and among them for a minute or two, trying to discover a corner where I could lie down. There was no question of making myself comfortable. I resented this, though dully, for I was too cold to have very much feeling left in me. My teeth chattered noisily in my head, and I was shaken by disabling fits of shivering. I edged myself into a corner where comparatively few larch poles seemed to run into me, and sank on to the ground between them in the extreme of weakness and misery. I had not had time to settle myself down when suddenly there came to me, through the wooden wall of the barn, the sound of loud voices rapidly approaching.

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CHAPTER XIX

I AM HOSPITABLY ENTERTAINED

So far as I knew there was only one way out.

I must bolt at once if I hoped to get through the door before the owners of the voices came nearer, and I raised myself hastily from my uncomfortable couch. As I did so, the pile of poles against which I had rested tipped up and clattered with a frightful racket all over the place. I had no wish to be caught there like a rat in a trap. As best I could for the darkness, I stole to the door, pushed it open, and came immediately face to face with a hefty-looking German who was clearly waiting for me.

He greeted me with a shout. At the sound two more men ran up and closed in on me at once.

They were all big and strong, and were too many for me. One strong civilian was a rare sight in Germany at that time; the odds against meeting three together must have been enormous.

By what bad luck these three great fellows all happened to be coming home at one in the morning, I never made out, but I think they had been to a meeting of some sort. One of them was the owner of the barn. They had seen my footprints leave the road and go round the barn. Naturally they suspected something wrong.

Without any explanation they marched me off to the house of the barn's owner—the large chalet close by. Inside the door I took off my dripping mackintosh and cap. I smiled to myself, in spite of my disaster, as I hung them up on a peg for all the world as if I were a

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shooting guest. Then I followed my "host" to the sitting room, where a delicious warmth met us.

It was an oddly arranged room. On one side a series of three stone steps ran all along it, and I soon found that it was from them that the heat emanated. They were, in fact, the stove.

Without a word I sat down on the top step. I spread my hands out on either side of me and tried to absorb the warmth. I was being shaken all the time by violent shivering. Shivers so huge that they rocked me to and fro where I sat.

Opposite me sat the three men. They began talking together, regarding me curiously the while. Soon the "host," however, noticed the plight I was in; he rose, and went to a cupboard at the end of the room, opened it, and returned bearing a black bottle.

He poured some of the contents into a glass and gave it to me. I lapped it up. It was Schnapps.

I smiled gratefully at him, as little wavelets of warmth began to run through my skin. The shivers grew milder but still continued, and my noble capturer poured me out another glassful.

As I showed signs of recovery the three began to cross-examine me, and I saw no point in answering untruthfully. I could not deny that I was not a German, so I owned to the damaging fact. When we reached this point one of the three slipped out to fetch a guard. (Dangerous people, these escaped prisoners.)

Meanwhile my host, who it appeared was the Burgomaster of Unter Mettingen, made conversation to me about roe-deer shooting in the neighbouring forest. Presently the conversation, I suppose, having shown that we had tastes in common, he got up, and,

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opening a door, put his head into the staircase behind it and shouted up the stairs.

In a surprisingly short time a whole troupe of small boys came down in answer to his call. They were clad lightly in their breeches and shirts, and were closely followed by their mother in not very much more. To her the Burgomaster issued some rough commands, with the result, in course of time, that a delicious ragout of roe-deer made its appearance, accompanied by steaming potatoes.

This act of hospitality completely conquered me.

The guard arrived before the end of the repast; but I was allowed to finish it, and then, after a friendly farewell, I was marched away down the village street to the local lock-up. It was already occupied by a gang of Russian prisoners, but some of these were bundled out of an upper room and I took their place. While the arrangements were being made, the guard and I indulged in a rather heated discussion as to the origin of the war. These men were a very good lot of local products, wood-cutters and peasant farmers, burly and well-made men with the simple minds natural to their sturdy country bodies. There was one, I remember, who talked very heatedly. He said:

"I can't understand how the English can fight us! Lots of them used to come here before the war, and we were very good to them. Why, I recollect one little boy who got lost in the forest with his mother. They came to my house, and I gave them milk and *Schweinefleisch!*" And then he repeated two or three times over, in tones of increasing wonder and indignation: "And after that you go and make war on us!"

He was quite angry and quite in earnest.

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It is always interesting, and often surprising, to observe the interpretation put by untutored minds upon the machinations of their rulers.

There was a stove in my room, so I asked for a fire in order to dry my clothes. Some billets of wood were brought to me, and I spent most of what remained to me of the night not only in the endeavour to dry my soaking apparel, but also to burn, leaf by leaf, my precious Baedeker, as I well knew that its discovery would mean extra punishment for me. My worn-out compass I stuffed into the mattress of the bed, and left it there. I did not think that the rest of a Russian prisoner was likely to be disturbed by the knob. My own was not. These acts of prudence accomplished, I slept peacefully till I was roused to be informed that I should have to march to the railway, but that I was to be allowed breakfast at the village inn, if I could pay for it. Accordingly I repaired to the pub in question and had a sumptuous breakfast. Unter Mettingen was one of those places where the Food Control was effectively dodged, and I imagine there was never any serious scarcity there.

By one of Fate's favourite little ironies, it was a beautiful morning. The sun shone brightly as we marched along the roads to Unter Eggingen, a frontier village, where I was deposited in the guardroom to await the train.

Here again the guard proved to be quite friendly. One peculiarly pleasant fellow produced a box full of English trout-flies.

"They were given to me by an Englishman," he told me. "I used to go a-fishing with him in the days of peace."

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While I was talking to this man I noticed that hanging on the door was a plan of every sentry post in the village. From this I made out that on a frontage of five hundred yards there were no less than six posts, placed more or less *en échelon*. Getting through that village, at any rate, would have been a toughish proposition.

With characteristic slowness the Germans did not notice that I was imprinting these details on my memory till I had been looking at the door for about half an hour. Then at length one of them did observe my fixed stare, and he got up and turned the plan round.

Presently the train came in, and I was escorted to Waldshut, where, in the very clean cell of a model gaol, I spent the afternoon and night. The next morning an old acquaintance turned up in the person of a sergeant of the Freiburg garrison, and in his company I accomplished the last stage of my return journey to my late prison. I whiled away the time in extracting from the sergeant some account of what happened there after we escaped.

After enquiring about Morris, and hearing that he had been caught, I said, tentatively:

"I hope the sentries weren't punished on our account?"

"Yes, they were," he replied; "they were very severely punished."

"Why, it was hardly their fault."

"Well," he explained, "the sentry in the lane was punished for not shooting."

"Oh, didn't he think that we were Herr Noske's departing guests?" I asked in some surprise.

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"Not for one second," was the disillusioning answer. "As a matter of fact, he put up his rifle to fire, when suddenly he caught sight of a party of German soldiers crossing the lane behind you. If he had fired he would have been bound to hit them as well as you. That made him hesitate till you had turned the corner, and then it was too late."

I was glad then that I had not looked round at that moment in the lane. It had certainly been one of those occasions when ignorance was bliss.

"Didn't he raise the alarm?" I asked after a pause, spent in recalling that, my most pleasant meeting with the German Army. "But I suppose he couldn't leave his post?" I added.

"He didn't need to leave it; there was an electric bell in the wall beside him. It rings in the guardroom. He rang it as soon as he had collected his wits; but you were away by then."

When I got back to Freiburg I saw Gulland, who told me the rest of the story.

The Germans had behaved in a way unusual to them. Their proper, well-known, and habitual course when anyone escaped was to hold an *Appell*, and our proper, well-known and habitual custom was to make that *Appell* as long, as confusing, as noisy and as irritating as a hundred rather boyish minds could contrive to render it.

In this case all the usual formalities had been omitted, with the result that poor Gulland spent the three-quarters of an hour wait that we had agreed on in the fond delusion that the way of escape still lay open to him. At the end of that time, he took, accompanied by his large pack, the same circuitous route as

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before, through the servants' quarters, and over the lavatory partitions.

"I had got as far as to push my pack through the hole in the wall," he told me, "and had heard it drop on to the paper below, when just as I was about to do the same thing myself, and had already stuck my head through the opening, an electric torch was flashed in my face."

It was a rude shock, and his retreat was so hasty that his baggage had to be abandoned. Whether the Germans with the torch recognized him or not, he was inevitably identified by his pack, and was promptly put into solitary confinement, where I found him on my return. Morris was next to me in the same snug quarters.

I had barely had time to fulfil my first duty to the community, which was to smuggle out in a hot potato a brief *résumé* of our route and experiences, when the interpreter arrived to inform me that we three were to leave for another camp on the following morning, and that the Commandant declined to see me.

I was not exactly hankering to see the Commandant myself, nor yet the poor Wachtmeister whom we had stuffed up with the tale of the defective drain. Still, the news that the disinclination was mutual was scarcely enough to compensate for being awakened to hear it at 2 a.m., which was the hour hit upon by my informant as a suitable one for honouring me with a visit. He was an example of the oily type of Boche, and lingered by my bedside to express his admiration of the colossal feat, as he was so polite as to term it, performed by us in crossing the mountains in winter.

"I was hardly able to sleep at night," he added,

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"while you were out, for thinking of what you must be suffering!"

It is sad that I should have been so lost to all sense of gratitude as to chuckle at this speech; but I knew that he had been the officer on duty on the night of our escape, and I had no doubt that he had caught it in the neck from the enraged Commandant. I could imagine that he had retired from that interview with much that might afford him matter for reflection during the watches of the night. A German Commandant on the rampage is not precisely a soother of pillows.

"Who supplied you with tools with which to make the hole in the wall?" he now asked insinuatingly.

My escorting sergeant had already told me that it was believed that we had received help from someone either in the garrison or the town, so I was prepared for the question. The Huns combined the lowest opinion of our talents with one, equally low, of their own countrymen's loyalty.

The interpreter entirely refused to believe me when I said:

"We made the hole in the wall with the back of an old file."

He elaborately protested, however, that I inspired him with complete confidence.

"Of course *I* believe you, my dear fellow," he smirked, "but the Commandant—he would not!"

With many apologies for waking me, he departed, probably to report to the Commandant that I lied even in my sleep.

Next day, I was conducted, under guard, to my old

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room. As all my friends, there present, had been warned that it would be high treason to speak to me, I packed up my things in an amused silence, everything that could have been said having been said already—inside the potato.

My breakfast that morning had contained, not only nourishment, but also the information that my report had been duly received.

At the last moment, however, just as I was finishing the packing, Dicey risked the displeasure of the guard by crying out:

"You've forgotten your toothpaste."

As he spoke, he pitched into my box a tube of gigantic size. It was so obviously a tube of toothpaste that I was on the point of forgetting myself so far as to disown it; but we were well trained, and checking the hasty impulse, I packed it gratefully away.

When I arrived at my destination I was not long in discovering that while the top end of the tube contained toothpaste, as per label, the bottom end contained a large map. Unluckily, though a beauty, the map was one of the extreme west of Germany, whereas I was despatched to the extreme east. But the thought was most kind, and I am always grateful for it.

I forget how long it took us to cross Germany from the extreme south-west to the furthest south-east. It was a two or three days' journey. We slept where we could. We were a congenial and a merry party, all well used to ignoring the Boche; but we made use of him when occasion required.

The trains were thronged; pressed as full as they could hold with crowds of soldiers, who were being transferred from the Russian Front to the West for

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the great offensive of March 1918. They all knew they were for it, and were in the lowest spirits.

I shall never forget the white face of one boy who flung himself on me at Cassel.

"When is the war going to end?" he inquired imploringly.

His voice besought me to reply that the end was in sight, but I answered jauntily in our usual formula:

"Oh, in two or three years, I expect," and he turned away with an audible groan. I could read his dejection written in the whole droop of his figure as he moved on. Poor little devil!

The green boughs with which the Germans at the beginning of the war decked the trains that were to carry their armies to victory and Paris were still employed for that purpose. Greenery hung around the carriage windows, but the poor soldiers felt that they themselves were in the sere and yellow leaf. The Germans went on to the bitter end with their decorations and green bough business. Nothing would make them drop a thing of that sort.

Farther on we ran into a portion of the Greek division that had sold the Rupel Pass to the Hun, under promise of being treated as honoured guests. The Hun's idea of honouring these guests was to make them work like any other prisoners for the good of the Vaterland.

Still further on we met a bevy of Persian notables, envoys to the great War Lord, as we were told with pride.

In the end we came to Schweidnitz in Silesia, where we were decanted and allotted to our respective cells, there to undergo for three weeks the punishment of

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solitary confinement. Three interminable weeks, in which to reflect how near we had been to success; twenty-one days in which to twiddle our thumbs and wonder whether we were going off our heads. For my part, I sought what consolation I could in the study of agriculture and philosophy.

CHAPTER XX

I INDULGE IN CUPBOARD LOVE

It was only six weeks since that morning when I had looked out of the window of my cell and recognized Dobbs and McLean in the yard below me. I had been undergoing my solitary incarceration as a punishment for escaping from Freiburg.

Balanced on the head of the bed I was staring out of the window at the life of the camp when those two appeared. They were strolling across from the direction of the kitchen hut.

With my expert eye I knew in a second that they had just come out of a tunnel.

They had the look of those who have hastily brushed sand from their clothes; in fact, I felt sure that their hair was full of sand at the moment. To others it might have seemed a little odd that they should be wearing their Burberrys on that bright morning, but then a prisoner's wardrobe is of necessity somewhat limited. Other people may have supposed that the solitary tunic of each of them was in the wash; I knew that those Burberrys concealed sandy shirts and probably an odd tool or two. Even at that distance I could see

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the drawn look on their faces that comes from working in foul air. There was an insouciance about their demeanour that was beautiful to behold; still, I did not think it was due to natural geniality that they entered into such an animated conversation with a passing officer just at the moment when a Hun soldier would have crossed their path. Besides, it was against Dobbs's principles to be genial before 4 p.m. He used to accuse me of being genial before breakfast, and always cursed me for it. Hope rose in my heart. I felt sure Dobbs would give me a place in his plans if he could.

It was not long before I managed to get a message to him, and received a discreet but cheering reply. As I had never yet been in the camp, and expected, rightly enough, to find few former acquaintances there, this was a great piece of luck, and very much lightened the remainder of my solitary confinement.

I needed some comfort, for the next few days of my punishment coincided with the worst five days in the war, when the Germans broke through the front of our Fifth Army. I did not sleep for five nights then. . .

My information reached me through a very decent corporal in charge of my guard, who had been brought up on Prince Lichnowsky's estate, and possibly, like his overlord, took a more lenient view of the English than is usual amongst Germans. I could by now tell pretty accurately whether a German was lying or not. After the offensive had been in progress some days this man had gone to Aachen on escort duty; on the way he had met train-loads of British prisoners, and he had also talked to numbers of German wounded. He represented these as light casualties due to rifle fire, and said they were all astonished that they had suffered

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so little from our artillery. But what alarmed me most was their statement that the Germans had invented a new system of registering for their guns which had proved of deadly efficiency. I felt that nothing less than what must amount to a new engine of destruction could account for the overwhelming Hun success; to learn that the new weapon had been found only confirmed my fears. When I was let out, I was terribly, horribly depressed, and I found everyone else equally wretched. There was only one officer, Captain Macdonald, who managed to convince us that he at least thought that we should get over the knock. It was enormously to his credit, for he was a Mons prisoner, and had had nearly four years of prison.

One of the worst parts of being in prison was the hatred one felt for the Huns. It is frightful to live for years with that emotion as a predominant one. Every day it grew and grew, fed constantly either by cruelty, or daily slights, or offensiveness either to oneself or to someone else.

It is a miracle that any prisoner's character survived being forced to harbour for so long this seething and constantly rekindled passion of anger and resentment.

I cannot find words to convey the extent of my relief when at length I reached Austria and found that the Austrians did not produce in me the same frame of mind.

Soon after this I was let out of my cell, and reported myself at once to Dobbs. I was promised the first vacancy in the tunnel party, which vacancy soon occurred, as one of the original members went to Holland as an exchanged prisoner, and I took my place again at the now familiar job.

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The kitchen where we cooked our food was in a wooden hut, that after the manner of many of its kind was raised a few inches from the ground by being set on piles. The Germans were in the habit of using the space under it as a rubbish heap, and so many old tins and broken bottles had been pushed beneath the walls that the gaps were pretty well filled, and any view of the middle of the space completely blocked. Inside, the hut contained a kitchen and scullery, with a passage down one side. A German was in charge, but actually our own orderlies and officers were the people who chiefly used the hut.

At the end of the passage stood a cupboard, roughly made of some common wood. A low framework of boards formed a support or stand for the upper part, which was shaped like an ordinary hanging cupboard, only instead of hooks this was fitted with two or three shelves. On the lowest shelf lay a large dish-cover of wire gauze.

Many times was the door of that cupboard opened, and many a hungry Hun (for at this date the Huns were always hungry) gazed regretfully at the lonely wire dish-cover waiting in vain for the dish that never came.

Oh, innocent Hun!

Oh, innocent dish-cover!

Who would have suspected that my first had only to remove my second (as they say in the conundrums) to find that the bottom of the cupboard had been made to lift up so that it was possible to get down through it and cut one's way through the floor of the hut into the space beneath?

For five or six weeks after I was let out of cells the

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usual grind of tunnel-making went on. Patiently, day by day, we evaded the Hun suspicions, let ourselves in turn quietly down through our trap-door, wormed our way about among the broken glass below, and slowly and steadily dug and scooped.

CHAPTER XXI

APPELL

THE German sentries at Schweidnitz were very easy to bribe and corrupt. They were all so extraordinarily hungry, and not very desperately warlike either. They were bribed with food, not money; the price of a Hun at that time in those parts was about one sixpenny tin of cocoa or a quarter of a pound of "marge." For these and other edibles they would bring us compasses, maps, and civilian clothes, without any necessity for prolonged negotiations or elaborate diplomacy on either side. It is only fair to say that they no doubt did it largely for the sake of their wives and children, who, as we could see when we went for our walks, were in a pitiful state of under-nourishment.

In this way we had collected an altogether unusual quantity of forbidden goods. Unfortunately, the Germans' eyes were opened when some of the first prisoners to escape from this camp were recaptured and found to have in their possession all sorts of objects believed to be unobtainable.

The suspicions thus aroused were not mentioned to the camp at large; but one day, when I was painfully scratching at the far end of the tunnel, McLean

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passed on to me in a hoarse whisper the one electrifying word: "Appell!"

This meant a surprise *Appell*. We naturally were not down in the tunnel at a time when, normally, one would have taken place.

We wriggled backwards the fifteen yards of the shaft, beating all records, and, for my part, cutting my knee pretty badly in the process. Hastily we climbed out and closed down the cupboard shelf. We snatched our clean trousers out of the kitchen range that we used as a green-room for these performances, each of which might so easily have been Positively the Last. I hurriedly drew mine on over the sand-laden breeches I had been working in, and fled out to the *Appell* ground.

As I went I noticed with foreboding the presence of quantities of unknown Huns.

"What's up?" I inquired anxiously as I mixed with the as yet unformed ranks of assembling officers.

"Search!"

And in an undertone someone added: "Berlin detectives!"

"Give me a minute, Robin, to go to the hut," I urged. And I edged towards my hut, knowing full well that Morris would see to it that my squad fell in with extreme slowness.

In the hut there was not time to do much. One thing was clear. I must rescue Sandeman's precious large-scale map, the only one in the camp, which I was then engaged in copying. I snatched it up and shot it into my breast pocket.

I reached my squad again in time to hear Robin Morris say:

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"There's going to be a personal search."

There was no time to go back to the hut. Where on earth should I hide the map? I looked up, down, east, west. Nowhere. Suddenly my eye fell on the hut's washing hanging limply on lines stretched between the apple-trees. Would there be a pocket big enough in the skipper's pyjamas? George's drawers were too transparent. That bath towel? The very thing!

I sidled across the grass. The nearest Hun was busy trying to unravel the next squad but one, and no eye seemed actually to be upon me. With a *dégagé* air I took the paper by a fold, and lifting up a corner of the towel, I slipped the map under it and on to the line. Then back I strolled, scarcely daring to believe I had not been observed.

"The officers, prisoners of war, will proceed to the chapel."

This was a subtle thought of the Huns. Cut off from our huts they could search both us and them at leisure. In point of fact, one half of the officers thus compulsorily attending the place of worship carried thither on their persons the damning evidence of their sins. Personally, I at once proceeded to the further end of a providentially crowded pew, and took off my trousers.

Then I took off my breeches.

I laid these reverently between the heating pipes. At this moment the organ began to play a somewhat secular tune, and to its strains I replaced my trousers.

Och Jimmie's joined the Volunteers.
And a pair o' tartan breeks he wears,
Paradin' on the Sabbath morn
When the folks are in the Kirk.

While I was thus occupied the same thought

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seemed to strike the whole body of men, and there was a stampede for the organ gallery. The Huns still paced the aisle under the impression, perhaps, that they were vergers, and the music continued *tant bien que mal*, while in the next few seconds every pipe and particle of the organ was stuffed with compasses and civilian caps and clothing. Though the lower part of the organ was invisible from below, the unseemliness of the proceedings attracted the Huns' attention to that instrument, and before the day was out the organ lay dissolved into its component parts, many hundreds in numbers, before the enraged but triumphant Landsturm.

After this we were called out by batches to be personally searched in our huts.

I had erected in my hut a wooden framework with brown paper pinned to it on both sides, to make a kind of screen round my bed. At least, this was the ostensible reason, but really I used the space between the two sides of it as a wardrobe for my *verboten* caps and clothing. This screen the detectives smartly smacked all over, except in one place, the one to my guilty eye obviously bulging with the very thing they were looking for.

Next my box was turned out, and in it they found the green canvas bath which was my pride and joy. I had reckoned that this would successfully maintain its nominal rôle, but the Germans still more firmly maintained that it was cast for another part.

In vain I spread it on the floor, sat down in it, offered to pour water into it. Never was audience left colder. The bath, with a few other items, was handed to the waiting sentry.

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"I am afraid I must ask you to take off your coat," said the Hun officer, who had been in prison in England, and had been exchanged. This unusual civility surprised me until he explained himself, saying:

"I, too, have been a prisoner. Two years was I in England."

"I hope you were well treated?" I said.

"Yes, I was very well treated," said he.

I successfully got my braces off without their noticing that my compass was fastened to them.

Outside and inside the hut the Berlin detectives were having a high old time. They had discovered that the stove in each hut, as well as the flue-pipe running up from it, had appealed to a vast number of officers as an ideal hiding-place, and they were raking down from them make-ups of every kind, like sweeps pulling starlings' nests out of chimneys.

I saw one detective outside the hut cast his eye up towards the gutter. For a minute he hesitated, as if he was saying to himself: "It is too high. No one could reach it." And then I could see that he changed his mind.

"These English are so agile," he seemed to be thinking. "There's no knowing where they may climb to!" And he called for a ladder.

Sure enough, he reaped a perfect harvest of contraband.

The united efforts of the searchers had produced such tremendous results that in the end barrows had to be sent for; outside each hut after two or three hours of hunting, stood one of these handcarts heaped high with our most cherished possessions.

The posse of sleuths marched off in high spirits,

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having shown the locals how the thing should be done and generally covering themselves with glory. We had been temporarily overmatched. It was quite time for us to reassert our supremacy.

Old Pig-Face, the Feldwebel, tired but gloating, was standing guard over the barrow outside our hut. I walked up to him and began a voluble diatribe on the iniquity of robbing the poor British officer of his few household gods.

"Wie schändlich ist es, dass die armen Offiziere von ihrer liebsten Besitzungen beraubt werden."

My fingers hovered lightly over the booty as I talked, but without any suggestion that I should use any means to regain them, other than argument.

Moment by moment old Pig-Face warmed to the dispute. His eyes flashed defiance into mine, and ceased to fix themselves upon his trust. He let go of the handles of the barrow in order to gesticulate, and as he took a step backwards I edged nearer and interposed myself inch by inch between him and the pile.

I could feel, rather than see, the hands of faithful friends extending themselves to good purpose behind my back, and I knew that the contents of the barrow was melting silently away. But, becoming too bold, a marauding hand showed itself beyond the cover of my body. With a shout of rage, old Pig-Face rushed round me. Too late. A khaki tunic was disappearing behind the corner of a hut, and several innocent-looking officers were taking their evening constitutional along the path. Who could positively assert that they represented a recently dismantled parcel-conveyer? He turned on me with a look of angry suspicion which quickly became certainty.

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But who so bland, so staid, so almost commiserating, so impossible to suspect or, shall I say to convict, as I?

"Haben Sie dann etwas verloren?" I inquired in a tone of deep concern.

I luckily did not know enough German to be certain what he replied, but it hardly sounded as if he appreciated my sympathy. One's motives are so often misunderstood. It is an ungrateful world.

The German machine got into gear again. Under a rain of orders the barrows with their remaining contents were wheeled off to the guardroom. It did not escape our notice that as its final destination our property was stowed away in the room just over the guard.

Quite safe.

Oh, yes! Quite, quite safe.

In the neighbourhood of Seven Dials, when those who lived without the law gathered in conclave, the profession was divided and subdivided into the various expert branches. In our ranks the same methods had long been adopted. The Confidence man and the light-fingered gentry having done their part, the experienced house-breakers were now called in. To burgle Newgate itself is surely the highest test of organized efficiency. It was the turn of the cracksman. The crib to be cracked was situated actually just above the guardroom; there, moreover, the way was barred by a locked door in the passage between the punishment cells.

To me it seemed that our gang of burglars were setting themselves an impossible task.

In his department, that of locksmith, Flying Jack had no rival; and he had friends willing and able to

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back him. The position, however, appeared to be impregnable. Yet, behold! Allah and Flying Jack are great! Next morning I received a wireless:

"If you wish to recover your canvas bath come to Hut Three after *Appell.*"

To Hut Three I duly repaired, and on a cupboard shelf in post-war England my canvas bath is at this moment enjoying a well-earned repose.

At last there came a day when these and other alarms and excursions were put behind us. A day when our work was finished, the way ready and we ourselves deep in the final preparations for our journey.

It seemed altogether too good to be true.

CHAPTER XXII

WE REACH THE LIGHT

SANDEMAN had been down the tunnel in the middle of the day, had hacked out the greater part of the last yard of earth which had been left for cover, and had actually shoved an iron bar into the outer air. I had been holding myself back from believing in this tunnel. We had suffered so many disappointments, and had had so many failures that I did not dare to hope too much. And the idea that that very night we might get away was a thought so thrilling as to be almost unbelievable.

There were a good many arrangements to be made. Even after preparations and planning had been going on for months, at the last minute there was a lot to do. We were most of us old hands, and our nerves were

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steadier than might otherwise have been expected. Poor Dobbs, who had been in more tunnels than any of us, and with worse luck, and to whom the success of this tunnel was principally due, could not help being a bit crestfallen because he and his partner had drawn only sixth place when we drew lots for the order of our going.

Two young Highlanders had drawn the first place, and were much delighted.

"We ought to cross the frontier to-night and be in Austria to-morrow," Sandeman said hopefully. And he quoted former feats of endurance performed by him on his native moors.

"I think it will take us two nights at least," Moyle disagreed; he was one of the fourth pair.

Gilchrist, the South African, and Bevington said little, but were, I think, full of calm confidence in Bevington's thorough knowledge of German. It was certainly the most useful accomplishment an escaper could possess, though it was not to prove so in this case.

I could not help wondering what kind of plans occupied the minds of the second couple, Grimwood, the actor, and Sloan, the Scottish International three-quarter. On the face of it rather an oddly assorted pair, but I knew them to be thorough good chaps, both stout and keen.

Our orders were that we must all be under the kitchen hut by 5.30 that evening. The hut was left and locked for the night at six; as it was summer and would be light till half-past ten, we should have to lie *perdu* for about five hours before we could venture to start. At ten o'clock there was an evening *Appell*,

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which meant that all the rooms were visited by a German N.C.O., who had to satisfy himself that no prisoner was missing. It was peculiarly necessary that he should be quite satisfied on the point on this particular night, since, as a matter of fact, there would be a deficiency of prisoners to the tune of no less than two dozen. To meet this difficulty each of us was detailed to induce someone to arrange in his bed a dummy figure that should give a life-like performance of its duties as understudy.

I went to an officer of the Naval Reserve, Captain Blaikie, with whom I had been friendly, and asked him to make a dummy in my bed so that when the German Feldwebel came round to see, at ten o'clock, that prisoners were all present in barrack rooms, the empty bed should not cause an alarm to be raised. Some of these Feldwebels were more thorough than others, but a lax and friendly one was due for duty that night. It seemed rather mean to let down this fellow who had been more civil and obliging than most of them. He was sure to get a heavy punishment if we succeeded in throwing dust in his eyes, but there was no help for it. The weakest point in the whole scheme was this dummy business; if one dummy was discovered, the alarm would be given a clear hour before we could make a start.

My dummy-maker was a Captain of a big ocean liner. Possibly he thought that stuffing dummies for beds was a job hardly in keeping with his dignity and high rank. Anyhow, he did it, and must have done it effectively. The next thing was to unearth my trusty bath; or rather Gulland's; and to see that the puttees, by means of which it was converted into a rucksack, were

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stoutly sewn on. The bath, of green canvas, had oddly enough the virtue of being waterproof. Next came the question of headgear. My millinery was pulled out of its cache and overhauled.

I selected a blue cap of naval design, once the property of a French sergeant of marines, from whom I had borrowed it at Freiburg. My faith in this ornament was quite touching, but my partner Murray looked at it askance from the first. He himself was the proud possessor of a genuine Hun "Kiss-me-quick." Having decided this important matter I began to stuff into the bath the food-stuffs, the spare socks and handkerchiefs, the toothbrush, soap, and safety razor.

Last, and most important of all, I stowed away an excellent small-scale map of the country as far as the frontier, and such maps of Austria and the Roumanian frontier as I had been able to cut out of the German papers, in which they were used to illustrate the movements of the armies. One other article I laid ready on the bed; a bottle of water for refreshment during the long and hot wait in store for me under the kitchen floor.

At six o'clock the last British officer who had been cooking in the kitchen hut left it, and there remained in it only the grim band of escapers. We felt exactly like criminals; as we always did, for that matter. The first and second parties numbered altogether about twenty-four. The first batch, who had dug the tunnel, was to be allowed to get clear away, and then given an hour's start before the second lot went off.

The second party's chances did not look very rosy, and they did not feel exactly rosy about it either. . . .

The twenty-fifth man clapped down the cupboard

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shelf and the dish-cover on the disappearing back of the twenty-fourth. Then he left the hut empty. It would be half an hour before the German came round and locked up.

The clatter of dishes had given way to a queer silence, broken only by the muffled sound of heavy bodies being dragged through broken glass. The space available underneath the hut and around the top of the shaft was sadly inadequate to our numbers.

The twenty-fourth man gave what he hoped was his final wriggle before settling down for five hours of forced inaction, and prepared to concentrate his mind solely upon the joist sticking into his back. He had occupied what he fondly imagined was the minimum space into which the human body could squeeze. I forget the name of the scientist who has laid down the laws of squeezability. Number twenty-four had obviously never known them.

By the time No. 1 had got into his allotted portion at the foot of the shaft, No. 24 had been compressed twenty-three times beyond the limit of human endurance. I could move my hand and the water-bottle in it to my mouth and back to the ground, and that was all.

After what seemed a long while we heard the German come in, look round the kitchen, lock the door, and go away.

Time seemed interminable.

Observe the perfection of the brain that planned this scheme. Number One, at the bottom of the pit, who alone could give the signal to advance, and Number Two, his partner, were the only two who had room to turn round, and therefore the only two removed from the temptation of breaking out before the hour

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fixed, viz. 11 p.m. I believe all our chances hung on that.

The final hour was to some extent made easier by Numbers One and Two moving up to the further end of the tunnel. I could hear them cautiously removing the last foot or two of earth that had been left for cover. Until this was done not more than two or three could be allowed in the tunnel without exhausting all the air, in spite of the ventilating fan being worked all the time by the next man. I had hoped for a draught of fresh air once the exit was broken open, but none of it got past the substantial bodies of my forerunners. But still, what a relief it was to be able to move forward in my turn and drop into the shaft and to know also that this meant that the first two were out and unobserved! We had a candle in the shaft, and here I abandoned my water-bottle, and saw to it that my mackintosh was tightly strapped round my pack. There was no room for it on my back in the tunnel, so I waited till I saw Facer's heel vanish into the darkness, then pushed my pack in after him and followed myself in the now familiar attitude of a worm. As I crawled along I kept contact with Facer's heel, and occasionally got a whisper back.

"Gilchrist is out."

And again: "Bevington is out."

It was an arduous job. The sweat streamed off on to the sand below. My heart thumped against the left wall and rebounded on to the right. The first fifteen yards were downhill so as to get under the footings of the camp wall, but after that the grade rose steeply to the mouth of the tunnel.

It was a slow business. A few yards of this creeping

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was so exhausting that we were obliged to lie still very often and do nothing but gasp for some seconds. We had agreed, also, to halt for two minutes each time someone left the mouth of the burrow, so as to give him a chance to get out of shot of the sentry before the next on the list made a possibly noisy exit.

It seemed a long way. During one of our halts Facer's heel deserted me. He had gained on me, and might be out already.

Why on earth could not I see the blessed light of heaven? I struggled on and at last I saw it—not the least as I expected it, but a tiny disc of sky.

I realized that in two or three minutes I must take the cold plunge into danger, and my heart, already beating fast, went a beat faster.

I had plenty of time to wonder whether a Boche was standing just outside the hole with his bayonet at the ready. Was it possible that the first eight had got clear away without attracting notice? If a shot had been fired we should have heard it. But it was quite on the cards that Facer or his partner had been heard and that the sentry might have crept stealthily up and found the hole. He might even now be lying in wait for me.

The idea of coming upon him head-first and absolutely defenceless was not a pleasant one.

I crawled to the tip of the hole and lay still.

Slowly, inch by inch, I thrust my head half through till my ears were outside, and I could listen. I could feel the impetuous Murray fretting behind me, at my deliberation, but there was no sound; I pushed my pack gently down the slope in front of me.

The hole was too narrow for my shoulders, and I

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let go of my bundle for a moment in an effort to enlarge the opening. Immediately my pack rolled off without me down the hill. This was a fearful moment. If it reached the bushes below and crashed into them it would make a noise to awaken the dead! Thank goodness, after two turns it caught on a small stone and there stopped. I worked quietly with my shoulders at the edges of the aperture. The noise of the falling gravel, as I broke it away, sounded appallingly loud.

It seemed to Murray, gasping frantic whispers at my back, that I lay there for ages. In reality, it was only a few seconds.

I was out! Catching up my pack, I crawled along the side of the slope into a patch of shade, shielded from the arc light by some bushes. The camp lay alongside some public gardens and into these we had emerged. I was now crouching within a few yards of a path that wound up towards us from a Bier Kiosk below.

I squatted silently against the bank, and it was lucky I did so, for at that moment the sound of voices fell on my ear from close at hand, and I saw two dark figures approaching along the path.

CHAPTER XXIII

WE LEARN LOCAL OPINION

A PAIR of German lovers were wandering sentimentally towards me, the man's arm round his companion's waist and his eyes, thank Heaven! gazing into hers. They drew nearer and nearer, till I could

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hear every murmured word, and thought that they could not fail to see me. But they passed swiftly by, so close that I could nearly have touched them; too intent upon their talk to see the rigid figure that crouched in the shadow almost at their feet.

Another second, and a turn in the path took them out of sight.

At this instant, Murray, marching over the slope at express speed, loomed largely upon me. He was in a perfect fever of impatience, and was going ahead so fast that I only caught him by the coat just in time, and pulled him down, in spite of loudly whispered protests.

We crouched there for about a minute till we heard the steps of the German couple gradually die away. Then we got to our feet and crossed the path they had followed, only, as far as I was concerned, to run bang into a wire a few steps further on. It twanged horribly. Very soon we were out of the gardens, and on to the road which led from the camp gate to a railway arch and beyond.

There was no shadow here; we had no choice but to walk along the road in the light of the camp, in addition to that of a bright moon. However, we had done half the distance to the arch in safety when suddenly through it came a German civilian and his wife. There was nothing for it but to go straight past them; but it was an awkward meeting within two hundred yards of the main gate. As a matter of fact, the man gave the alarm when he reached the camp; and though the next pair got out all right, the second party, who were obliged to give us an hour's law, were all caught before their own start could be made.

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This couple looked at us in a shocked and surprised manner, but passed us without speaking, and we hurried on. A moment or two later we were overtaken by Dobbs and McLean. They looked a comic pair, Dobbs' huge form, dominated by a wide grin of delight at being out at last—he had been trying for three years—towering above his diminutive companion, who in spite of his small size had no difficulty in keeping up with him, for he was a wonderful walker. We were glad to see them safely out, and to give them precedence.

A quarter of a mile beyond the arch we lay down in a ditch, to arrange and put on our packs. We then set off straight along the high road that led to the wooded hills between us and the Austrian frontier. It was the usual German road, stretching straight as a ruler before us and lined with cherry trees. The rye in the fields that bordered it on either side was by now two or three feet high, and well in ear.

When we had gone about a mile we heard a noise of voices; some people were coming towards us, singing as they came. They were still some way off, and I said to Murray:

"We had better go into the rye."

I led the way into the field, stepping as carefully as I could so as to leave no track. Murray followed, and we lay down ten yards from the road.

The Germans came on, making a good deal of row; young men in uniform, each with a girl on his arm. I could hear them talking quite plainly.

"How sad I am, lieber Fritz, that you are going to the West Front!" one girl was saying, as she leant lovingly on her soldier's shoulder.

"Ach!" he replied, with a snort of bravado. "Ach,

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für mich ist es ganz egal, ob ich gegen die Russen oder gegen die Engländer Krieg führe."

I thought to myself, "You won't find it quite the same thing, my dear Fritz, I can promise you that." And I felt a thrill at the thought that possibly I might be there to greet him.

We had hopes, based on the map, of finding a bridle path through the low wooded hills that rose gently up to the low range of the frontier mountains. A mile or so further on we came to the border of these hills, and must have taken the wrong track, as it is only too easy to do in the darkness. It was a sandy track, winding among the trees and sometimes between low banks from which lumps of flat shale had broken off and lay about on the sand for us to stumble over. After going along it for some way, we came without warning upon a high bank, and saw just below us a sight that made us stop suddenly.

We were standing immediately above a wide, tree-fringed road, all steeped in shadow except where the moonlight pierced through the leaves to spread itself in white pools and trickles of light. The noise, too, of trickling waters was in the air; it came from the far side of the trees, where, at the bottom of the steep slope, a stream wound quietly in its bed. But this rural and peaceful scene was not deserted at this midnight hour. Far from it; it was humming with busy life.

The road was a-block with men and horses. A long procession of loaded wagons was passing along it in methodical and ordered array; the night was suddenly full of sounds.

The creaking of harness mingled with the voices of the wagoners as they admonished their teams; it was

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backed by the murmur of the little river beyond, whose voice came up to us intermittently between the rumble of the passing cart wheels.

Wagon after wagon went by; it seemed an endless string; we could not make out the nature of their loads, but I have no doubt that they were transporting provisions or ammunitions of some kind. Half concealed beneath the trees as they were, they seemed to swim from pool to pool of moonlight through deep seas of shadow, and looked to us very strange and mysterious and unaccountable. At last they had gone their creaking way, and in the silence that fell again upon the road the river seemed to sing its song more loudly.

We crossed over, and went on and on, growing more and more doubtful whether we were on the right track. At length all doubt vanished as we found ourselves on the point of emerging from the woods on the same side as that by which we had entered them.

This was a blow; we turned back and tried another track. We looked often at our compasses, but the path twisted about, and it was hard to be certain where we were going.

An hour or two later we had a nasty shock.

We were going through some fir-trees down a steep hill at whose base we hoped to find water. We had been following a narrow footpath that wound steeply down between the trees, and the black roof of the fir branches made it very dark.

All at once we ran straight into two men who were climbing up the path towards us. The thick carpet of pine needles deadened all sound of footsteps, both theirs and ours, and we were upon them without a

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moment's preparation. There was nothing for it but to go on, and on we went, while my heart seemed to stop beating utterly for about ten paces. As the second man brushed my elbow in passing, I heard the other say to him:

"Ruski, nai?"

But they did not stop, and disappeared up the path. What they were doing in the middle of the woods at two in the morning I don't know. As far as I could judge in the obscurity they were rough-looking men, and I think they may have been Bohemians. It was lucky for us that we did not strike them as being British officers, or they might have remembered that there was always a reward for those who recaptured the likes of us.

We collected some water in my sponge-bag, and doubled back up into the hills.

CHAPTER XXIV

WE LEAVE THE FATHERLAND

By this time we were very tired, and, as it soon would be light, we began looking about us for a place in which to lie up during the day. We came to a clearing where wood-cutters had been at work among young oak, and where they had left a lot of faggots and bundles of carefully peeled oak-stakes. We selected two of these as walking-sticks, and pushed on into some brushwood of young oaks, where we lay down upon a sweet-smelling bed of lilies of the valley. They grew thickly on all sides, making the place lovely with

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their scent; glad we were to nestle down under the young leaves of the oaks and stretch our weary limbs upon the crushed lilies. But dawn was upon us, and as the dim light began to filter through the scrub we saw that it was less thick than we had thought it in the night; less thick indeed than was very safe. So, gathering up our packs, we rose, and went on a little way till we came to a place where heather grew under scattered seedling pines; there in a little dip or hollow in the ground we lay down again among the heather, and went to sleep.

It was quite light when I awoke. The sunlight was already dancing in the tree-tops. The daily buzzing chorus of the insects had begun. Murray, at my feet, lay still sleeping, and near at hand some one was whistling a shrill tune.

During a second I lay, drowsily listening; then in a flash I was wide awake, and a prey to the most sickening anticipations. For between the stalks of the heather I could see the whistler. An overgrown German boy in blue cotton overalls, with a bunch of tow-coloured hair only half-hidden by his round cap, was advancing upon us, slashing about him with a stick as he came.

It was plain that he was looking for something. It might be eggs. I caught at the notion hopefully. But he was not only peering about him; he was carefully beating each bush, and I felt instantly certain that he was searching for us.

We could not yet be further than six or seven miles from the camp. By this time no doubt our escape was discovered, and the Germans were instituting a search for us in their usual methodical and thorough way all over the country.

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There was no possibility of getting away. We were barely covered by the heather. I looked again at Murray; he was sleeping peacefully. What if he should wake suddenly and sit up, or give a snort in his sleep, or cry out? But I dared not wake him. There was nothing for it but to hold my breath and wait.

On came the boy; as he walked he beat the heather; at every few steps he stopped and peered into some place where it grew more thickly; from time to time he called aloud to someone out of sight. Another searcher, no doubt. Up one strip he went, and down the next, and back again. No one could have hunted that ground more thoroughly. He missed only one solitary patch of it; and that was the patch where we lay hidden.

We were disturbed no more that day, and when darkness came again we wandered onwards through the woods all night without meeting any one, and making good progress. From time to time we crossed little cultivated valleys with farms and clusters of small houses dotted about them. Very beautiful they looked in the bright moonlight, and strangely peaceful in the silence and solitude of the night. Before day came we began to look about us once more for a snug spot to shelter in till evening, but to our dismay we could find no decent cover. We were by then walking among tall trees with little or no undergrowth, and the further we went the more it was the same thing.

At last, as it was getting light, we dropped down under some beeches where a few low brambles spread themselves over the ground. It was shockingly bad cover, but the place seemed very lonely and remote. We had hopes that we should scarcely require any

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screening, and solitude, after all, was our best concealment.

Our optimism was soon shattered. We had not been lying there half an hour when we heard a noise, and saw, to our horror, quite a crowd of people coming towards the wood. As they approached we made them out to be a band of Russian prisoners with their German guard. They were bearing straight down on us, and we had almost given ourselves up for lost when, not more than a hundred yards away, they halted and began to cut wood.

We lay flat among our brambles, hardly daring to breathe and expecting every moment to be discovered, for the briars were very thin and we were not half hidden by their stalks. It would be enough if one of the Germans strayed ever so little in our direction, or if the work of the prisoners led them by degrees nearer to us. We prayed that they would soon go away, but not they! All day long, for sixteen mortal hours, we lay there, and all day long by some miracle our presence remained unsuspected.

Sleep, of course, was out of the question, and the strain on our tired nerves was very great. When at last night fell and the party returned whence it had come, we were in a condition more fit for rest than for a long march; but we had no mind to be caught in that place again next morning, so in spite of fatigue we pushed on.

That night we climbed high among the hills, passing through most lovely wooded country, and coming out at last on to a long grassy ride that seemed to stretch interminably along the crest of the low range.

We noticed that it was marked out at intervals of about a hundred yards by large stones like mile-stones;

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only instead of figures to denote distances these had each incised or painted on it a cross—like the iron cross of the German military decoration. Could this be the Austrian frontier, we wondered?

We walked along the ride for some way. We had no idea how the frontier was bounded, and we discussed the possibility of these stones marking its delimitations. It soon struck us that if it really were the frontier there was likely to be some guard upon it—in fact, it was the absence of any visible guard that constituted our chief reason for doubt—and we decided that in any case the neighbourhood was unlikely to be a healthy one for escaped prisoners. So we struck off into the wooded slopes of the far side.

From these slopes we could see, far below us and miles away, the brilliant lights of what might have been a town; but it had a nasty familiar look about it to us, suggestive of a prisoners' camp. In this we were not mistaken.

Our camp, on this the third day since we escaped, was at the edge of a plantation of young trees, from which we could see far over the plain below. It was a most lovely view, and seemed in itself well worth escaping for. After years spent among the desolation of Gefangenenläger, those dusty acres where we had little to contemplate in the shape of scenery beyond barbed wire and army huts, where a blade of grass, if one were so rash as to grow, was a rarity like a palm-tree in Scotland, the beautiful country we were passing through was a constant and unfailing delight to both of us, and we used to gloat over it like long-lost mariners coming at last in sight of land.

When we had slept our fill on this day, we lay

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happily engrossed in the scene below us, and presently saw smoke rising further down the valley and made out a train that was puffing its way along into the plain.

Out came our maps. There was only one possible railway; this was one that ran down a re-entrant of Austrian territory, a narrow U-shaped valley bounded by hills; just like the one we were coming to. We were in Austria, then. With what joy we grew certain of that! Even if we were recaptured now we had great hopes that we might not be sent back to Germany, and surely any other country would be less unpleasant.

As we were talking of this and deciding that this must be the very valley down which the Prussians marched in 1866, there came to our ears the sound of a snapped twig and a rustling in the young trees, and we espied a young woman slowly approaching, stooping ever and again as she came, to add a stick to the bundle of firewood she was gathering. As we had already noticed, the leading shoots of these young fir-trees had mostly been broken off and lay strewn about the ground, and these the woman was collecting. We discovered before we left that place that the damage was being done by a beetle which infested the top shoots of the trees. It was so coloured as to counterfeit exactly the brown needles of last year's growth, and on that part of the tree it made its depredations, attacking the shoot in so vigorous a manner that it withered and fell right off. The woman hovered about quite near us, and we went through a repetition of the painful immobility and anxiety of the previous days. Presently there were cries of "MarieAnne! MarieAnne!" and an old man came up and joined her. Together they picked up firewood for a long time, and we

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were very thankful when at length they wandered away.

The next night and day were made miserable by a deluge of rain. We lay up in some low scrub on a sort of hill-side moorland, and were very wet and uncomfortable till it cleared, but we were not disturbed.

The night afterwards we made our way down to the railway and followed it for a good many miles. It was naturally far the shortest and most direct route, but it had its drawbacks. As though it followed the river's course it was cut through the curves and elbows of the hills between which the water swirled over its boulders so that we were constantly walking through cuttings blasted so narrowly out of the rock that once when a train went by we had barely room, by flattening ourselves against the wall, to let it pass. When we came out of these it was generally to cross the river by an equally narrow bridge, where we stepped as quickly as we could from sleeper to sleeper. The spaces between them were filled with dizzy glimpses of the rushing torrent below, and the roar of it as it bawled among its stones made us continually uncertain as to whether or not we heard a train approaching. What we should have done if we had met one on those bridges was a thing we avoided thinking about. After a time we began to come to tunnels, and these also were unpleasant.

As we drew near the mouth of one which appeared to be about three hundred yards long, I suddenly saw, silhouetted against the arch of sky at the far end, the figure of a man. Even as I saw him he jumped across the track and seemed to flatten himself against the opposite wall. We stopped short and looked at each other. What was the man doing? Was he alone or

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with others? And were they lying in wait for us? Could anyone have guessed that we might take this road? Perhaps, even, some of our party had already travelled this way and been caught just here. It was such a perfect place for an ambush. We must be silhouetted against the dim light no less distinctly than the figure we had seen. We had thought the bare, rocky sides of the cutting too steep to climb, but now we turned to them instinctively, and it was surprising how quickly we had scaled them and were off across country over the top.

After that we took to the road. There was just one road, leading, like the railway and the river, down the valley. We were afraid to go too wide of them lest we should unwittingly get over the frontier again, as we knew that this narrow valley was a mere salient surrounded on three sides by Germany. We walked all night down the road; going boldly, or as boldly as we might, past other stray nightfarers and through an occasional slumbering village. The people we passed would generally wish us "Good-night" in a language we took to be Russian, but discovered later to be Czech.

Our feet were very sore and the road was very hard. It was paved with cobbles, and our wet boots made matters worse. However, we went a long way that night on our pulpy feet, coming finally to a little town through which we hurried without meeting a soul. As we emerged on the other side shutters were beginning to open, and these signs of life made us look hastily about for cover.

Seeing a wood at the side of the road we entered it, and lay down in some birch scrub. On our way we

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crossed paths and saw seats placed here and there, but only after we had been in hiding for some hours did we realize that we had hit upon a public park. I could not sleep for a long time because my feet hurt so much, but at last I dropped off.

When we woke it was midday, and it was to the sound of people talking. Moving very cautiously, I looked up, and saw an old man and a small child sitting on a bench on a path above, and not fifteen yards away from us. The whole of that afternoon we had the privilege of seeing and hearing the burghers of Nachod enjoying their Sunday outing. A continuous stream of children came along the path and played around us; they might at any moment have run straight into us, as they often penetrated the fringe of bushes beside the path, unlike German children, who do not as a rule show enough independence to move a step from the beaten track. Quantities of grown people came too, and the seat above us was never unoccupied during the rest of the day. Altogether we were very thankful when darkness at last drove them away, and could hardly believe our luck in having escaped detection.

On we went again. On and on.

Once we turned aside into a lesser road which led us deceitfully on till abruptly it ended at the river bank. We took off our boots and stockings and waded across, the stream being just deep enough and just swift enough to make it as much as we could do to avoid being swept off our feet. On the further side was a sort of lawn, and a few steps further we realized that we were in the garden of a private house. We stole out of it as quietly as we could, only to come out onto a drive and to be suddenly confronted with a keeper.

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He stopped us and questioned us angrily. I don't know if he guessed who we were, but anyhow we had no business there and no doubt he longed to run us in. But there was a pair of us, both a size or two larger than he was, and both armed with stout sticks; he thought better of it and let us pass. As we hurried on, thanking our stars, we came unexpectedly on a little town.

CHAPTER XXV

WE CEASE TO FLY BY NIGHT

It was perched on a cliff in a loop of the river and looked, in the bright moonlight, less like an ordinary sleeping town to be awakened to human bustle and activity in the morning, than like a little city built by people of a fairy story, and left by them under the spell of enchantment, while their business carried them to some distant world. There it stood, all swept and tidy and only waiting for the inhabitants to return to it. Right over the river, on the corner of the bluff, hung a yellow tower that looked as if it had come straight from Rome. It was just like one of the medieval towers there, left by the Roman barons. An Orsini or a Colonna would have been at home in it. We passed beneath it into a great cobbled square made mysterious by the dark recesses of an arcade, on whose snowy façade the shadows of Renaissance mouldings were painted with sharp and inky outline by the moon. We felt like trespassers on all the ages; out of the *guet-apens* behind the pillars might come with equal

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fitness a bravo of the Borgias, a sbirro of Ferdinand's, or a K. und K. gendarme.

No sound betrayed the presence of life in the city. We felt as if each house were holding its breath to listen to the rattle of our boots. The nails in the soles of them rang upon the stones so loudly that it seemed to us that a squadron of men-at-arms could hardly have made a more insistent entry, and as though behind the venetian shutters a thousand listeners crouched and watched us as we stole across the square.

At the far corner of that square we came upon a drinking fountain, and some spirit of recklessness urged us to stop and drink at it. Perhaps this act of ours broke the spell that was set upon the place, for from the blackness of the arcade there emerged an old man who looked us over, grinned, and went away. We also went away. Out of the square, out of the town, and across the gorge by a bridge.

Day began to break, and we sped up a steep hill. At the top was a signpost, a perfect encyclopædia of information. But all ahead of us was open country without any sign of cover.

"We must go back down the road," Murray said, "and try that wood just outside the town."

"All right."

And back we went.

As we strode round a corner, there arose before us the front ranks of a gang of fifty French and Italian prisoners. No doubt they were being led out to work. Broad grins greeted us. The guard, as far as we could see, was seized with a sudden zeal for march discipline. Anyhow they appeared interested in anything rather than us.

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Two bodies moving in opposite directions at the rate of five miles an hour do not take long to put distance between them. For two minutes our shoulders winced beneath imaginary hands; the next instant we dived into the wood.

"That was a piece of luck," we said to each other, as soon as we had put a small ravine or two between us and the road.

But the next moment we readjusted our opinion.

"Good Lord, I believe this is another blooming park!" Murray exclaimed in a low voice.

So it was.

We were the least thing off nursemaids and perambulators, after that interminable day at Nachod. However, this being no longer Sunday, the population of Neustadt stuck to its work and left us to our rest. Or perhaps the town really was enchanted, and empty. Nothing disturbed us; but at nightfall, as we were sallying forth again upon our journey, we ran bang into a youth who was advancing, gun in hand, along a glade. Whether we met him with looks more wild and scared than his own or not, I don't know; but he it was who turned and fled helter-skelter into the night.

No doubt the rabbits he was stalking had cause to be grateful to us.

We walked all night and lay up the next day in some birch undergrowth. Our success in the different encounters we had had so far, and the apparent absence of hostility in the people we met on our route, was doing much to encourage us.

Compared to the continual dread in which we lived at the beginning of our journey the feeling we had by

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now was almost one of confidence; about midday, after we had slept and eaten, Murray put it into words by saying:

"Look here, we shall take about a year to get to Roumania at this rate. I vote that we chuck this travelling by night business, and come out into the open."

"What do you mean?" I asked, rather startled.

"I mean we'd better try to get on by train," Murray said. "The people about here seem on the whole inclined to be friendly. I believe we could get away by rail quite well."

I was doubtful, and we had a long argument about it, at the end of which he convinced me that he was right, and I gave in.

"The first thing to do is to have a thorough clean up," Murray suggested then. We were in a fearful state of dirt and unkemptness, and looked like a pair of scarecrows. "We must shave," he said, "and then go to an hotel and have a night in bed if we can get it, or at all events a proper bath and wash."

I thought this was madness, and said so. But finally he persuaded me to his view, and we started by making a fire on which we heated some water. We proceeded to shave with a good deal of difficulty, as we had no looking-glass, but with help from each other we managed it. The fire was very welcome to us as a means of drying some of our clothes. Obliged as we were to withdraw from the public gaze at about 4 a.m., every morning, it generally meant crushing ourselves into long grass or bushes or growing corn, which at that hour was sure to be dripping with dew even in the finest weather, so that we spent the first few hours of

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every day lying with chattering teeth, soaked to the skin. The prospect of abandoning this sort of life was a tempting one, but in spite of everything it was with very unpleasant misgivings that at two or three in the afternoon we took our courage in both hands and stepped out on to the high road in the brilliant light of day.

We felt like two owls venturing forth at this unheard-of hour, and as owls in the daytime must expect to be quickly mobbed by flocks of small birds, so we, from moment to moment, were beset by the idea that we likewise would speedily be mobbed by the inhabitants of the countryside. But nothing happened; and we walked along with an ever-increasing sense of security. The people we passed looked at us and grinned knowingly, or sometimes sympathetically, calling out to us remarks which as far as I could make out were the equivalent of "Poor Russians," or something of the kind. We had always cherished hopes that the Bohemians would be friendly, but as these were founded on what I had read in German newspapers I had not as much confidence in them as I could have wished. We did not know, though we discovered it later, that the people in that part of the country were violently pro-Ally. Presently, however, we saw coming towards us three particularly large and formidable-looking men, whose whole appearance filled us with suspicion.

"We'd better turn round," Murray proposed.

But I protested against this. "We've made up our minds to march by day," I said; "it's no use giving up at the first sight of anyone we don't fancy the look of. Come on. Or, if you like, we'll sit down beside the road till they've gone by."

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This we did. But the three men did not go by as we hoped they would. When they came opposite to where we sat they stopped and showed every disposition to enter into conversation.

"What are you doing there?" they asked curiously.

"Tired," said I, pointing to my feet, which were certainly sore enough. I was always the spokesman. Murray did not know a word of German.

"So!" the first man said; "You have come far? And where are you going?"

"To Dobrushka," I replied, that being the name of the nearest town. I was pleased to observe that he spoke very bad German.

They considered us gravely for a minute or two; and then one of them remarked:

"You come from Josefstadt?"

"Certainly not!" I answered. I knew that Josefstadt was a prison camp. "We have come from Germany, from Breslau. We are Germans."

He did not seem convinced, and said decidedly:

"You are escaped Russian prisoners."

I tried to laugh. "No, no," I said. "We are not Russians. We are Germans."

"You are Russians, and you go to Olmutz and Cracow," he declared. "See here." And he produced a piece of paper and a pencil, and began to write. "See," he said, handing me the paper, and I saw that on it he had written a complete list of towns we should pass on our way to the Russian frontier. It seemed almost as if they were anxious to help us on our road. At any rate he was doing what a German would probably have been shot for, if he had been caught at it; and it is certain no German would have trusted his two compan-

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ions sufficiently to commit himself to so dangerous a step in their presence.

Still, we could not give ourselves away on the chance, so I stuck to it that we were Germans. They seemed disappointed but remained where they stood, looking at us, and I thought I might ask them to recommend us an inn further on. I had learnt the Czech word for inn by seeing it written up in the villages as we came along, and I now used it in my inquiry and tried to make him understand that I wanted to go to one which was kept by Czechs. He wrote me down a name on the bit of paper, and then at last the three reluctantly tore themselves from our agreeable society and proceeded on their way.

CHAPTER XXVI

WE TAKE THE TRAIN

We proceeded likewise on ours; coming presently to a wayside pub we entered boldly and demanded some beer. We obtained it, and paid three kroners for it.

We trudged on, and after some hours came to the town of Solnitz. Here was the inn our friend had given us the name of, and pulling ourselves together, or rather Murray pulling me, for I was very loth to risk it, we went in and made our way into the passage, not liking to go into the bar, from which a good deal of noise was coming. No one was to be seen, so we rang the bell.

A surly-looking man came out of the bar and asked us what we wanted.

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"Can we have rooms?" I asked in my best German.

He looked us up and down; the more he looked at us the less he seemed to like us.

"No rooms," he said at length. "I have no rooms."

This was discouraging, but I made another effort.

"Can you tell us," I said, "where we could find rooms in this town?"

He gave us another look.

"There are no rooms to be had anywhere in this place," he said shortly.

We turned to go, when suddenly the door of the bar was thrust open and out came a gendarme. He gave us one glance; it seemed to produce much the same effect on him that it had on the landlord. He bore down upon us like a hawk on its prey.

He began to catechize us relentlessly, but I put the best face on it I could. "What is all this?" said I. "We are two German citizens, and have every right to go about our business unmolested. We have our papers, and everything is in order."

"Papers?" he exclaimed, and his face fell. From our appearance he had not expected any such certificate of respectability.

So I produced my papers. A German journey permit; a badly faked copy of a Reise pass, with the official stamp drawn with an indelible pencil that had been carefully licked between each stroke to make it darker.

He twisted it round in his hand, examining it from every point of view, with some suspicion, but not so much as I had expected. He seemed on the point of letting us go when the street door opened and a second gendarme appeared on the threshold.

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This time we gave ourselves up for lost.

The newcomer hastened to join the party; but, marvellous to relate, he seemed if anything more easy to satisfy than his brother policeman.

Everyone, except Murray, then talked simultaneously till at last nobody seemed to have any more to say. I had relapsed into silence for some time, but I now interposed, saying:

"Well, we can't get beds here. Can you tell us where we can get them, further on?"

"I doubt if you will at all," one of the policemen replied; "if you do anywhere, it will be at the 'Three Crowns' at Reichenau."

"Good-night," said I. "It's getting late; and we've a good five miles to go," and away we went. One resolve formed itself instantaneously in our minds, viz.: not to go to the "Three Crowns" at Reichenau. Murray went on grumbling that he could never make himself presentable for the railway unless he could get a wash and brush-up and a night in bed. As a matter of fact we spent the tail-end of that night under a gigantic silver fir, and our wash and brush-up was done pretty thoroughly in a beautiful little streamlet that flowed round its roots. We even washed our socks. Next day we proposed to exchange the road for the rail, so we marched on to Kosteletz, the terminus of a small branch line which we had all along been aiming at as a quiet and secluded spot.

Into the quietest-looking inn there we walked, in search of a time-table and food. Any scrap of food was worth having for us and worth a certain risk. On a sanguine estimate it looked as if we should be able to hoard only about seven days' rations for the last

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hundred miles' march into Roumania, and we did not consider it safe to take the rail to nearer the frontier than that.

The time-table we wanted mainly in order to avoid long waits at the stations under the eyes of police and railway officials.

There was no one in the bar except a young woman, and she was too engrossed in packing up a parcel to give us much attention. With a sidelong glance I watched her addressing the package to Private Kolas, 129th Reserve Infantry Regiment, on the Italian Front. It was large and full of good food, but somehow she did not seem to relish the task.

I said: "Can we have two beers, please, miss?" or the equivalent of this in German; she said "Yes," very grumpily; and I thought a little tactful sympathy was called for.

"Horrible thing, war," I said.

"Yes," she replied, "and my man does not get enough rations to keep body and soul together. I have to keep sending him food, and, goodness knows, it's hard come by." And she threw a wistful glance at the parcel and gave a vicious tug at its last knot. Then she put it aside and had more time for us.

"Have you a time-table?" I inquired, when she had set two glasses of excellent beer before us.

"Yes," she said, "but I know all the trains from here. There's one at three o'clock." She paused and looked at me in a funny way. Then she added: "But if I were you I should walk to Tinischt."

Tinischt was the junction, six miles on.

"Oh, why?" I asked uneasily. "It's a hot day, and we've walked some way already."

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I did not like the look she had given me, nor the tone of voice either, in which she offered her advice. I was not reassured by the way she looked at me now; there seemed more than a hint of mockery in her glance, and when she answered my question it was with a sort of little hard chuckle.

"You don't suppose I think you're Germans, do you?" she said. "My German is bad enough, but yours is worse!"

I must own that I did not know what to say to this; while I was racking my brains for the best line of action, she continued:

"It wouldn't do my house any good if you went from it to the station . . ." she broke off abruptly, and I could see that it had been on the tip of her tongue to finish her sentence by adding: "and were arrested there!"

So I merely thanked her and asked what time the train left Tinischt.

"About 4.30," she told me, and by mutual consent our conversation drifted to less questionable topics. A few minutes afterwards horrid emphasis was lent to her warning by the sight of a gendarme who sauntered past the window. He slewed his head round as he did so, and had a good look in; but passed on.

This episode safely over, we slunk out again and took the hot and dusty road that led across the plain to Tinischt.

Perhaps the heat had something to do with it, perhaps such a lot of gendarmes were getting on our nerves; anyhow, when we sat down by the third milestone for a short halt, a serious dispute arose between us. We were now going to take the train,

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but for what destination? Roumania or Switzerland? To Murray, Roumania was a long way off, and had the disadvantage of being a defeated country, probably partially occupied by the Germans. To me the road to Switzerland lay all along the back of the Austrian Front against Italy, and through Innsbruck, which I believed to be the G.H.Q. for the Austrians. In the end I prevailed, and any qualms I may have had on the question of my being right were set at rest later on when I heard what happened to one of our fellow escapers, Sloan, the football international.

He and his companion got safely away to a point much further south than Tinischt, and there contrived somehow to become separated.

Sloan wandered on alone till his feet were so sore that he could walk no longer, whereupon he went straight to a hotel, engaged a room, took to his bed, and sent for a doctor. The doctor was a Bohemian, but talked good enough German to be quick in spotting the unfortunate fact that Sloan did not.

He taxed his patient with being an escaped prisoner and an Englishman at that, and Sloan was obliged to admit that he was a Briton. His astonishment was no less great than his relief when the doctor, instead of giving him over to the police, told him he sympathized heartily with him, and proceeded to do everything he could to help him on his way.

"What line of escape was he trying for?" he asked; and Sloan told him the Swiss Frontier.

"That will never do," said the doctor. "It is guarded most jealously night and day. You will never get away by that route. You must make for Roumania; I have friends who can provide you with a well-forged passport

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and help you to get through successfully. It is not nearly so difficult in the East."

Sloan, however, hesitated to put such trust in a stranger. He would have none of Roumania, home of brigands and heiducks, whatever they might be, so, when his feet were well, he said good-bye to the doctor and made for the west. He got nabbed near Innsbruck.

Our decision arrived at, Murray and I discovered that we had wasted more time over it than we had to spare, so we hurried on at a great pace, and rushed into Tinischt station just in time to see our train go out of it. The ticket guichet shut with a slam just as I approached it, and we were left staring at each other and being stared at by the half-dozen or so people lounging around the booking-office.

One of these was a porter very resplendently dressed in a light blue uniform, but mild in manner, and of him we were obliged to inquire what time the next train went. He gave us a very queer glance; but told us it would go at nine. For want of anything better to do we then went over to the station buffet, where we ordered *Wurst* and salad, the only food obtainable.

We sat there for a couple of hours, growing steadily more and more uneasy beneath the stares of the various passengers who slowly collected. At last their interest became intolerable, and we whispered to each other: "Let's go back to the woods!"

As we uncoiled our six or so feet apiece from behind the table, one long-drawn gasp arose from the assembly, whose members appeared never previously to have seen anyone quite so long and lank.

Leaving them open-mouthed, we sped out into the

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woods. Woods seemed to have become our natural habitat. They were the only places where we felt at home.

In a secluded spot we spent the remaining hours of waiting, whittling down our oaken staves which we began to think attracted notice by their unusual length, and watching the gyrations of a pair of night-jars. We both felt miserably nervous; and on the way back to the station Murray burst into a strange and forced song, in itself such a depressing display that I was obliged to laugh, whereby his desire to lighten the atmosphere of gloom was achieved.

I carefully rehearsed what I was going to say, as I had to be economical of my German. We decided that I should say no more than "Two single tickets for Chotzen," at the same time planking down the money. Chotzen was the next considerable junction. We did not dare take long-distance tickets, for fear it might be thought strange that two such tramp-like people should have so much money. Another thing that worried us greatly was that all the funds we had, amounting to one hundred and forty marks, were in German money, and we had no means of knowing either what the exchange was or whether German money would be accepted in Austria. However, this time all went well, and we were delighted to find that we could get so far for so little—seventeen kilometres towards Roumania at the cost of half a kroner each.

We had to wait about five minutes—and they were bad ones—in the booking-office. Then the gates leading to the trains were opened and we went through them with the other passengers on to the platform, where we had another five minutes to wait before the train

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came in. We kept as much out of sight as we could, avoiding especially the neighbourhood of the station-master, who we thought looked at us with no favourable eye; and we found ourselves at last in a third-class carriage. We had selected one in which there were no soldiers, and this piece of caution nearly cost us dear. The compartment was mostly full of the farmer class, but there was one old bagman of a well-known and virulent type.

Whatever anyone else's wishes might be, he wished to talk. And talk he did, first to our fellow-travellers, and then, when he had exhausted their possibilities, to us, or rather to me, as I was sitting next to him. As he got no encouragement from me in the way of general conversation, he fell back upon questions; soon I was undergoing a complete cross-examination which became more and more pointed and impertinent, as my replies became more and more inadequate. In the end, after he had conveyed to the rest of the carriage his far from encouraging judgment upon us, I hitched my shoulder round and pretended to go to sleep. But I did wish I knew the Austrian equivalent for "Go to hell and keep your mouth shut!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MAN WITH THE RING

We reached Chotzen about eleven. The platform was seething with people, chiefly soldiers. It was so crowded that we had simply to push our way through. Our first problem was to discover at what time the

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train left for Cracow, our next objective, but we were not able to find any time-table, or board with the trains written up on it, though we hunted all over the station. At last we took refuge in the big waiting-hall which was littered with soldiers, sleeping on the floor or dozing on the benches. We crouched down on the floor in one corner. From time to time a porter came in and shouted out the destination of the next train, and we settled down to wait till we should hear him say Cracow. But somehow or other we never did hear it, and consequently missed the train that went about one o'clock in the morning. At last I summoned up my courage to ask, and learnt that the next one would leave at seven.

So we went on waiting till six, when we could no longer put off the problem of changing our German money.

"We shall have to go to the bank," Murray murmured in my ear. "We might be able to change it there."

I did not like going out into the town where we should have to pass gendarmes and heaven knew who, but we soon decided that there was nothing else for it.

"The worst of it," Murray said, "is that appalling cap of yours. Everyone looks at it. Now we're in a town you'd better get a nice hat like mine."

Although I was loth to believe that if people stared at my lovely cap it would be with any feeling other than admiration or envy, it began to creep over me sadly that there might be something in what Murray said.

"But," I objected, "if this cap is such a give-away,

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I can't go into a shop with it. You'll have to lend me your hat."

Murray saw the force of this argument, and we settled to go out of the town and find some place where he could hide, in a wood or somewhere, and that he should wait while I went back to the town in his hat to do the shopping. He could not go himself because he knew no German. We started down a long passage that led out of the station; but at the end of it we were stopped by a rather well-dressed young man.

"Are you strangers here?" he asked politely; "if so, can I be of any assistance to you?"

"Yes," I answered hopefully. "We are Germans, and have nothing but German money. I shall be most grateful if you can tell me where I can change it."

"You can change it at the post office," he said; "however, to-day it is only open from nine till ten. But you're not Germans," he added.

My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth in the effort to find an answer. At last, for the sake of saying something, I stammered out:

"Why do you say that?"

"You don't look like Germans," he said. "You don't speak like Germans. You can't be Germans."

While he delivered this crushing indictment he slowly raised his hand in front of my face, turning it round so that the knuckles were presented to my inspection. On the middle finger was a signet ring with a black stone incised with white characters, something like Egyptian hieroglyphics. He held it thus for an appreciable time while I gazed at it open-mouthed in a fascinated and idiotic manner. Was it a Freemason's

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sign? or that of an agent for helping escaped prisoners? Was he a member of some patriotic Czech society, or contrariwise was he in the Secret Police? I could not decide, but I would have given worlds to know. I half believed he was a friend, but I thought it safest to stick to our story.

So I said again, "We are Germans."

He seemed rather disgusted and, without another word, turned and went off down the road.

So did we. After turning a few corners we came suddenly on him again. He was walking along in the same direction as us, but on the opposite side-walk. When he saw us he crossed the road, and the conversation we had already had was virtually repeated, only with a shade more annoyance on his part.

At last he shrugged his shoulders and went away, leaving me more doubtful than ever whether he was a friend or not. Since then I have regretted that I did not trust him; and I beg him, if he ever reads these memoirs, to set my mind at rest by writing to me, care of my publishers.

We walked on, out of the little town and past two or three fields till we came to a grove of trees where we arranged that Murray should wait for me. We both had considerable doubt as to the likelihood of my ever returning from the expedition I was embarking on, so that we parted in some despondency. I left Murray the map and compass, but I had necessarily to take the money with me; and if I were to be arrested in the town it was plain that he would be left in a sorry plight, with no money and unable to make himself understood by anyone. I told him that if I were not back by ten, he had better give me up;

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then, feeling very pessimistic, I left him and retraced my steps to Chotzen.

There were not many people about; I avoided one gendarme successfully and found my way to the post office. The door was open, but just inside I met the postmaster, who said that the office was shut and would not open till ten.

"Oh," said I, "I was told that it would be open between nine and ten."

"Well, you were told wrong," he replied. He was a surly individual and showed no wish to help me. I turned away, and walked along the street to a hat shop I had noticed that displayed in its window the very hat I wanted, one exactly the same shape as I saw worn by every one around me. I went in and demanded it.

The man in the shop was all smiles; I tried on the hat and hesitated a little while between it and another which was rather dearer. In the end I decided on the first one, and then came the awkward moment when I must pay for my purchase. The price was thirty-two kronen.

"No," the shopkeeper said, "I won't take German money."

"Why not?" I urged. "You have only to change it."

"I can't change it," he declared. "Besides, I don't know the rate of exchange."

"You can easily change it at the post office," I told him with a great air of assurance. "And as for the exchange, it is twenty marks for thirty kronen. At least it was a fortnight ago."

I had looked it up in the German papers before we set forth.

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"No matter," said the shopman. "It is too much trouble, and you may be wrong about the exchange. Anyhow I won't do it." He was rapidly becoming hostile.

I was in despair.

"Look here," I said as a last resort, "a mark's worth more than a krone, anyway. You admit that? Well, I'll give you thirty-two marks. They will certainly be worth more than thirty-two kronen. What do you say to that?"

He wanted to object, but the profit was too large, and he succumbed.

I put on the hat and went out into the street. I had some time to wait before the post office would be open, so I took a side street and struck up a steep hill that led me out of the town on to a sort of grassy down. Here I sat down; and presently, as I waited, towards me came a quantity of people all beautifully got up in their finest raiment. It was evidently a feast day of some import. First appeared bands of little children in white dresses, begarlanded with wreaths and chaplets of daisy chains, only instead of daisies they had used the white, wax-like blossoms of a sort of heath. Then family after family passed me, the men in their Sunday black, the young girls in white muslin dresses, the older women in their national costume. They all went down the hill through some orchards gay with blossom; and on into the town, where by now all the bells were ringing like mad. I wondered rather wretchedly if it was another victory.

At last it was time to go back to the post office, but when I got there the same surly postman told me that it would not be open all day in spite of what

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he'd said earlier. Before I turned away I asked him:

"What sort of feast day is this?"

And he said: "It is our national Bohemian feast."

There seemed nothing to be done, so I went back to Murray, who had been pretty anxious and was nearly despairing of me. I don't know which he was more pleased to see—me or my beautiful new hat, which he ecstatically admired.

There was nothing for it but to try the station, so we walked hastily back to it, advanced boldly to the booking-office, demanded tickets for Olmutz, and presented our German notes; which were promptly accepted without a murmur!

A very fair amount of change was returned to us, and we hurried on to the platform. We had had enough of conversational civilians in the last train, and decided to go for a carriage with soldiers in it this time. We were quite right, as very few of them could speak German, or too little to make them wish for much talk in that tongue.

It was very hot in the carriages, and they were terribly overcrowded. One friendly soldier asked where we were going. I told him Cracow, and added that we had only tickets to Olmutz.

"You can get an extension in the train if you like," he told me.

So when the conductor came round I asked for an extension, and got it for as far as Cracow. He made no trouble about taking German money and gave me a little change back.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

WE MEET A GOURMET

We got to Cracow at about eleven at night. The station was a perfect pandemonium of soldiers and Polish Jews. We took tickets to Lemberg, and found out that the train for that place started at 2 a.m. Of course, we had nowhere to go to except the waiting-room. We went to the first-class waiting-room, but were turned out of that without much ado. Murray's nose had been bleeding frantically in the train, and we wanted some place where we could wash him up. We had to go back to the third-class waiting-room. It was an enormous room, absolutely packed with Polish Jews. The only vacant spot was on the floor by the double swing doors that gave access from outside, and on a portion of a bench occupied by a fat young Jewess with bare feet, who was lying there asleep. Murray was exhausted by his nose-bleeding; he squeezed himself on to the bench, where he fell asleep. When we rose up to take the train we were horrified to find that his head had been resting on the Jewess's dirty feet.

This was the most awful night I ever spent. All night long the doors swung to and fro, admitting or letting out Jewish priests and novices. The Jewish priest in Poland practises the economy of the lilies of the field in his expenditure on clothing, wearing one and the same garment from the day of his birth till the day of his death. He pursues the same system with his hair, which he never cuts.

Alternating with these clerics appeared women of

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the same race. As they swished through the doors within a few inches of my head, I received the full benefit of the stink that entered with them. Each of them seemed to wear about a dozen petticoats, and from my point of vantage I could see, as well as smell, that each was filthier than the last.

Cracow is well known to be the dirtiest city in Europe.

When the train at length came in, there was a terrific rush across the rails to board it. Murray and I modestly brought up the rear, not liking to thrust ourselves forward; by the time we arrived there was no room left, not even standing room in the cattle trucks.

We climbed on to the foot-boards and pushed into the entrance of one of these, but we could scarcely get a knee in. While we clung to the edge of the crowd there arose a sudden hubbub from the packed mass of humanity at the back of the truck. Almost at once there was a shot, followed by groans, and the military police came running up. It was no place for us. We looked along the rest of the train. There was not a square inch empty, even on the foot-boards. There was nothing for it but to wait for the next train.

Three hours longer we waited. Thank goodness most of the priesthood had been successful in the fight for places, and the waiting-room was now occupied mainly by the Army, which was less objectionable. At last another train came in, and this time we found room to stand on the little platform at the end of a carriage, like the tram platforms in England. We shared it with two soldiers, one of whom, a Galician, was an amiable enough fellow; we presented him

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with a pinch of tobacco, and there ensued some attempt at conversation, carried on on his side partly by signs, partly in bad German.

After an hour's run we stopped and were shunted about to allow a very fine train, all made up of sleeping cars and saloons, to pass us. It was full of smart people dressed in black coats and top hats, and evidently very important. We watched them being served with an elaborate meal while the two trains stopped opposite each other, and I know two passengers on the east-bound train who suddenly experienced with socialistic and revolutionary doctrines a sympathy that had hitherto been foreign to them.

After half an hour's shunting, on we went at a good pace, delighted to know that at this rate we might, in another twenty-four hours or so, reach the point at which we meant to leave the train for good. We rolled on through prosperous-looking country which showed little trace of having been the scene of Mackensen's victorious advance.

With the exception of the bridges, which had been destroyed and rebuilt with very new-looking white piers two years previously, not a building seemed to have been injured. The very thatch on the cottage roofs was old and untouched; the crops were magnificent; nothing could less have betrayed the recent passage of an army.

Once over the Galician border we were able to buy hard-boiled eggs at the stations, as the neighbouring peasantry met the trains with supplies of them, and sold them to passengers; so we determined to lay in a store; or at all events to live on them for the next day or two and save up our own provisions.

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Now, to our dismay, an official made his appearance on the train whose business was to search among the travellers for deserters from the Army. By waiting till he was occupied in one of the compartments, and then dodging past him along the corridor, we managed to avoid attracting his notice; but such luck was too good to last. A few hours later this man went off duty; another took his place, and the first thing we knew, there he was in the doorway, his eyes fixed accusingly on us. We had by this time found places in one of the carriages, and I saw his glance wander to the rack above us where our packs bulged only too conspicuously.

"Your tickets," he began by demanding.

"Here they are," I said promptly.

"So," said he with that odious accent of doubt that was so horribly familiar to me. "Have you Reisepassen?"

I was forced to produce my papers; they seemed, I thought, to make a pretty fair impression on him.

"And where are you going?" he asked.

"We are going to Stanislau," I replied.

He looked again towards the rack. "I see," he said, "you have rucksacs up there. What is in them?"

"Our food," said I, and regretted it the next minute.

"How, food?" he said. "What sort of food? Food in tins?"

"Yes," I answered unhappily.

"Let's have a look," said he; and pulling down one of our packs, he proceeded to undo it. The very first thing that came out was a bottle of Horlick's malted milk tabloids. I had been so foolish as to leave the label on. The idea of being given away by our belong-

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ings had never struck me. As a rule, in escaping, things never reached that point. You were suspected; you were arrested; and there was an end of it.

The inspector pored over the label; but I could see he was not able to make out in what language it was printed.

"Are these German Konserven?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," I said emphatically, "that's what they are."

"I didn't know the Germans made anything like this," he said. "Are you sure it's food?"

With the short-sighted idea that it was better to convince him that I had spoken the truth in one respect at least, I took a tablet out of the bottle and munched it.

"Is it good?" he asked with some curiosity.

"Delicious," I said, and added, "It's made of milk."

"Give me some," he demanded.

I tipped a few into his palm; after licking them doubtfully, he gobbled them up and at once put out his hand for more.

They were absolutely our life's blood, and it was very gingerly that I tipped out a few more. He ate them with great relish, and the next time he took the bottle from me and saw to it that an end was put to such ill-judged economy. After that he sampled some Bovril tablets.

This had all taken some time, and now with a start he seemed to remember that he had duties to perform. Rather hastily saying something about our papers having to be visé-d by the station Commandant at or before Przemysl, he cheerfully took his departure.

I thought we had squared him, or at any rate that

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he might be squared with a ten kronen-piece, which I immediately extracted, like a tooth, from Murray, who was the banker. Our funds were getting unpleasantly low. I thought also that the inspector himself meant to take the papers to the station Commandant and that we should thus get out of an interview. In this happy state of illusion we trundled along to Jaroslav. Then, unfortunately, I got out, and walked down the long platform to get a drink of water from the tap for myself and Murray.

When I came back with my tin cup in my hand, Murray was in a state of some agitation. He whispered to me:

"The inspector has been here and seemed very savage at not finding you. He muttered about Przemysl."

"Confound it!" said I.

Possibly if we had denied ourselves that drink of water our fate might have been different.

We went on to Przemysl in a much less happy frame of mind; but consoled ourselves with a hard-boiled egg apiece.

Murray was still savouring his, taking a bite, and then looking at it and thinking how delicious it was, when the train pulled up. My anxious gaze fell on a platform crowded with soldiers, and the inspector hauling out first one and then another of our fellow travellers. It was not long before he came to us.

"You must come to the Commandant's office," he informed us.

I held out my papers and said: "Can't you get these visé-d for us without my coming?"

However, he had this time put on a completely

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official manner. My hopes of being able to make use of him fell to the ground with a thud. It was a nasty shock, and it was now too late to take any other steps. How I wish we had absconded at the last station, but a thousand difficulties would have arisen if we had left the railway then; our food would not have lasted a third of the way; our boots, even, would hardly have done the whole distance; we had no detailed maps; we could not speak one word of either Polish or Ruthenian and our route lay through country where those were the only languages spoken. To stick to the train had really been our one chance.

Murray persisted with his egg till the inspector's patience could stand it no longer and he began to get nasty. He roughly ordered us out, and then hurried us along the platform and through the crowds of gaping soldiers. At the R.T.O.'s office we fell in at the end of a queue of unhappy deserters and soldiers who had overstayed their leave, or whose passes were out of order. These were summarily despatched by the station Commandant, and then came our turn.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FLICK OF THE GLOVE

THE inspector handed over our faked papers.

"Who signed this pass?" the Commandant asked me when he had looked at it. He was a smart, business-like-looking little man.

"The police-lieutenant at Schweidnitz, Herr Hauptmann."

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"He had no right to give you such a pass. Have you no other papers?"

"I thought these would be sufficient," I said, and vaguely repeated the words "Polizei Leutnant," not being able to think of any other.

"What are you?" was the next question.

"Miners, Herr Hauptmann." This I said because the Schweidnitz district abounded in mines, worked for the most part by Poles.

"I see you are described as German Poles. Do you speak Polish?"

We were now, of course, in Polish-Galicia. It was perhaps short-sighted of us to have put ourselves down as German Poles, but knowing that we had to get through Bohemia first, and that my German was very sketchy, we had thought it provided an excuse.

"No, Herr Hauptmann. My father was a Pole. My mother was a German, and our father died when we were quite young."

A grunt was the only comment vouchsafed on this statement.

"And your Kamarad, what does he speak?" the Commandant went on after a moment's pause.

"Unfortunately he cannot speak, Herr Hauptmann. He was wounded fighting against the Russians." So saying, I pulled the hat off the unresisting Murray, and twisted his head round by the hair, till I could display a scar in the head he had received at Ypres from very different foes.

"Do you mean to say he can't speak at all? How does he communicate with you?"

"He can make me understand. We have been so long together."

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"How?"

"Oh, by signs and er—er——" I began to stammer.

The conversation was getting beyond me. But the miserable business dragged on.

"Where do you think you're going to?"

"To Stanislau, Herr Hauptmann."

"That you're certainly not! Do you know that Stanislau is in the war zone? And what do you think you're going to do when you get there?"

I embarked on a long rigmarole, delivered as fast as I could string the pieces together, to the effect that we had had comrades who had fought on that front, and that they had told us they had seen good signs of minerals in the mountains near by.

"Do you mean to say that you are thinking of mining near Stanislau in the middle of the war?"

"No, Herr Hauptmann. We were only going to prospect during the war with a view to developing what we found when peace is declared."

I am afraid this tale was not well received. Anyhow the only reply to it was an order to "Stand back!"

And we were made to stand back against the wall.

A subaltern asked me a few more questions of the same nature.

"You are quite sure your comrade cannot speak to you?" he finished by saying.

"Sure," I said; and at that he left us and went out of the room.

The clock that hung above the Commandant's head ticked slowly on; out of the corner of my eye I could see poor Murray standing stiffly to attention; his face gloomy; his eyes eloquent with the questions he did not dare to ask. It was an awful position for him.

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It was obvious that things were going badly, but how badly he could not say.

Presently the door opened, and in danced the most perfect specimen of the fashionable General's fashionable aide-de-camp that even the Ringstrasse can ever have seen. He was quite young, not more than twenty, not more than moderately tall, but slightly built; he had pink cheeks and merry blue eyes, and looked altogether a nice, clean boy. He walked across the room to the Commandant's desk, elegantly twirling, as he went, the dogskin gloves he carried in his hand.

As he passed us, where we stood plastered against the wall, his eyes lit, with surprise at first, and then with amusement. I could see him interrogating the Commandant about us. When he stepped back from the desk, a happy idea seemed to strike him. He walked past us, and as he did so, he lifted his glove and flicked it suddenly within a quarter of an inch of Murray's nose. I thought Murray would have hit him; he was very quick-tempered. Instead of any such catastrophe, however, he set his face as if we were playing "Smiling Snap."

The young sprig of nobility danced away with a *dégagé* air; sidled round the room, making a pretence of becoming much occupied with something quite different; and then, when he had imperceptibly drawn nearer to us, he turned suddenly round and flicked his glove at Murray again. This manœuvre he repeated four or five times. He did all this with the gayest air in the world, and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself.

About the third time Murray's face split apart, and for the next three rounds, his grin became broader

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and broader. It was a nervous grin, quite unlike the pleased smile that illuminated the countenance of the young sprig.

After the fifth round Murray chose a moment when he thought no one was looking, and with his lips rather than with his voice, formed the words: "I can't stand this much longer!"

At once the glass door to the platform burst open, and in rushed the subaltern who had left the room a little while before.

In a furious voice he yelled at me:

"You said your comrade never spoke. I saw him speak to you!"

I answered nothing. But the game was up.

It was in any case obvious that we should be detained until our German references had been taken up, and I can't say I much relished the idea of replying to the charge of forging the Polizei Leutnant's seal of office, even though I had bestowed on him the signature, equally forged, of the Commandant of Zorndorf fortress, which we had copied because it was the least German signature we happened to have by us. There was also the unpleasant possibility of being treated as spies; in which case there might not be much time for explanations.

I stepped past the subaltern who was interrogating me, saluted the sprig, and said:

"We are British officers."

"So—o?" said he, and whistled through his teeth.

"I thought as much," the Commandant observed as he learned the news.

This was perhaps not very surprising, for it would have been hard to find a more uncontinental-looking

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pair. At the same time I *was* rather surprised. The number of British officers who had visited Przemysl since the outbreak of war must surely have been few.

CHAPTER XXX

SHORT COMMONS

THE Austrians were pleasant enough now, and in half an hour an officer came with two soldiers and fetched us to the office of the Major Commandant of the town.

After Hunland it was a contrast to hear the privates ordered to carry our packs, to be given comfortable chairs to sit on, before the Major's desk; to be offered coffee and cigarettes; and actually to be asked whether we would prefer to stay in Austria or to be sent back to Germany.

I said: "Well, we weren't very popular in Germany when we started; we should be even less so now."

And I thought of the Polizei Leutnant at Schweidnitz and his forged seal. I should think it would have meant for us ten years in a fortress, which was the sentence passed on one of my friends.

I don't remember all that conversation, but two remarks of the Commandant's stick in my mind:

"I suppose you regard the war as virtually over?" he said. "The Entente can hardly rally after its recent reverses?"

When I expressed a confidence in our victory that at the moment I was far from feeling (the end of May

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1918 was not an encouraging moment for us), he rejoined:

"Of course you are British, and must say that."

"Perhaps," I replied; "but you are Austrian and must say the contrary."

"Not an Austrian," he corrected me. "I am a Pole."

This was the first time I came in contact with the curious attitude of the various compartments of the Austrian Empire. This man, though fighting for that Empire and boasting of its victories, would not bear the imputation of being called an Austrian.

"Well," the Major went on, "we shall have to write and find out whether you can stay in Austria or not. Meanwhile you will have to go to the military gaol. Don't worry, you won't be there long."

Thereupon we were led off to the military gaol, only a few streets away.

It was a large place; tall and gloomy to look upon from outside. It did not seem probable that we should like the look of it from inside much better. A sentry-box stood by some iron gates, and through them we passed into a gravelled courtyard which surrounded the main building. We were received by the Oberst, who was a Colonel of Bozniak Infantry. He was a tough-looking old sport; I liked the look of him, anyhow.

"Well, young gentlemen," he said, "I'll make you as comfortable as I can. You'll be together in one room, and you'll have rather better fare than the ordinary prisoners. But you must expect a little hardship in war, eh? I had a hard time myself with my Bosnians in 1915 up in the Carpathians in the snow;

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they're splendid fighters, those men of mine, and we did just hold the front."

He was obviously proud of his campaigning. I thought that his grizzled hair justified his pride. Very soon he handed us over to the provost, a warrant officer, who conducted us to our room and locked us in while we fired at him a hail of requests for every sort of thing we could think of that might tend to alleviate our lot. As soon as he could he escaped from us, and we were left to settle down as best we could in our latest sample of gaol.

It was a fair-sized room that we had been given, with two beds in it, and a small window high up by the ceiling. Out of that window we could just see the corner of a roof, where two or three jackdaws often perched. It was so high up and so much overshadowed by the tiles opposite that it seemed to keep out as much light as it admitted, and the room was always in a semi-obscurity. Murray and I had plenty to say to each other at first. We had not been able to talk together for the last three days, and much that had happened had been incomprehensible to him. For a long while we discussed the people and events that had led to our downfall. Our spirits were not of the best. It was, of course, disheartening to be caught, and to see all our hopes vanish; there were also very disquieting possibilities in the future which insisted on obtruding themselves into our thoughts.

If we were sent back to Germany, goodness knows what we might not have to contemplate in the way of punishment. Theoretically we were entitled to an immediate trial; but in practice the Huns were apt to delay such a proceeding indefinitely; meanwhile keep-

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ing those awaiting trial in solitary confinement. In the end we might be sentenced to ten years in a fortress. We could be accused of all sorts of crimes beyond the mere escape. The forging of names of Polizei Leutnants was in itself not likely to be taken as a mitigating circumstance. One way and another I did not like the prospect. So we had plenty to discuss.

We talked and talked.

We talked for days.

But at length there came a time when we had said everything there was to be said, and when we had said it more than once. Gradually our discussions died away; fewer words were spoken; and what few there were tended more and more to deal with one subject, and one only. That subject was food. A great and increasing gloom fell over us. In our half-dark chamber our thoughts grew ever darker, as if affected in hue by the dismal atmosphere. We would lie upon our beds, and speak only from time to time.

"I wonder if the next meal will be that delicious maize soup," Murray would say; "or nothing but the water without the maize?"

"It's about the turn of the water," I would reply.

Then a silence for ten minutes. And then one of us would say again:

"What time is it? How much longer have we to wait before we shall get anything to eat?"

Our bread ration for the day was no larger than a big slice of cake. We ate it as slowly as we could, whittling it away with our knives, and putting the shavings slowly into our mouths, while we tried to spin out the time by talking of other things.

We only had the maize dish (which was called *koo-*

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kooroos) once in two or three days; on the other days its place was taken by a thin and watery soup; with sometimes a potato.

One day I had a little more bread than Murray—a piece about the size of a large walnut. I put it on the table between our two beds, and as I lay there I could see that ever and anon my companion's eyes turned towards it as if irresistibly drawn. At last I said:

"You'd better have that bit of bread, Murray. I don't think I want it."

But he jumped up, refusing to entertain the idea.

"If we once don't stick to our rations," he protested, "it's hopeless!"

And he fell to pacing up and down the room, thereby making himself even hungrier than before, and presently threw himself again upon his bed, exclaiming as he did so:

"I wish we were back in Germany! At least we should get our parcels there and not be starved!"

It is strange that even a prison warder may be more or less of a human being. When we were first led through the dark passages of stone flanked on either side by cells that gave access to our room, it did not occur to either of us that the exterior of our guide, the Provost, might conceal anything resembling a heart of flesh and blood. Yet in a few days we grew to look forward to his visits; he was a sort of link with the outside world, and on the whole not an unfriendly one.

We were sitting talking on the first evening of our capture, when suddenly down the chilly corridors there echoed a cry so horrible and so piercing that it curdled our blood as we listened to it. Shriek after shriek rang out terribly clear in spite of the massive

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walls that separated us from the luckless victim, of what outrage we could only guess.

So much for the smooth words of the Austrians, thought I, as I sat and shuddered at the sounds. What dark deeds were being enacted so near us? That we were helpless was being painfully brought home to us. There we were only a few yards away, but absolutely without power to go to the assistance of our unfortunate fellow prisoner.

I remembered the experience of a Russian friend of mine who had been imprisoned after his capture in Prussia with hundreds of other Russian officers, twenty of them packed like sardines in a cell; they had had to listen to the sounds of one of their friends and a British officer being flogged almost to death for having tried to escape.

What was happening here? Were the Austrians really no better than the Prussians?

Slowly the cries died away and we were left to our thoughts—none of the pleasantest.

Later that evening the Russian whose duty it was to do our room, came in and busied himself in making things tidy; and him we questioned eagerly, but could make nothing of his replies. Not till next morning, when the Provost again put in an appearance, did we learn the truth.

When he understood what we wanted to know, he went off into fits of laughter.

"Those yells," he told us, when he had recovered his gravity, "were made by the Jew. He screams like that every week when he is taken to his bath. He screams because he has to leave his clothes behind and he is afraid they will be gone when he comes back."

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After a day or two we applied to have our hair cut, and the Provost said he would arrange that it should be done. Sure enough, two barbers were brought to our room that afternoon; I was surprised to see that the one allotted to me wore the uniform of a cadet officer.

"What are you doing in here?" I asked him as he took up the scissors and advanced to the task of shearing my by this time rather exuberant locks.

"Oh," said he cheerfully. "I was caught trying to fly my aeroplane over to the Russians."

We thought it very extraordinary that not only should he be still alive after being caught in such a misdeed, but that he should now openly be boasting of it. I never found out exactly who Murray's man was, but I think he was a murderer.

We applied urgently to be allowed out for exercise, and at the end of a week we were given leave to go out for about an hour daily to exercise ourselves in the potato patch at the back of the court behind the prison. Here we walked up and down, watching potatoes being earthed up; other objects of interest being confined to a couple of apple trees and perhaps a bird or two. We soon discovered, however, something more exciting, in the fact that there was a window low down in the prison wall near the ground, which gave on to the scene of our "recreations," and that this was no other than the kitchen window. We could not keep our hungry eyes off that window, and presently, when no one was about, we contrived to make the acquaintance of the cook. He was a genial and kind individual, a deserter and a Czech. For this he was being punished by having to cook for the prison, and he was hard at

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work for a good eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. Poor fellow, he was pallid and exhausted by want of slumber and used sometimes to go to sleep on the draining-board of the sink when he could keep upright no longer.

To coax a bowl of coffee and, more rarely, a piece of something that might be misnamed bread out of him now became our chief concern, and gave us a sort of object for our walk. The cook had two assistants, both Russians; one a South Russian from the Ukraine, and the other, by his own account, a Bolshevist.

The Bolshy was a Herculean fellow, with a savage face covered with scars, and the expression of a wolf. He had been in the Boxer War in China, but when at home was a market porter in Moscow. There was some talk of our escaping with him to Russia, and I must say I trembled at the thought; but beyond giving me several sleepless nights, nothing came of it.

Another acquaintance we made was the understudy of the Provost, a Hungarian sergeant-major. He was so good as to explain to me the causes of the war.

"The aristocrats made the war," he said. "No one wanted it but the politicians. We of the people were too numerous; they had to get rid of us somehow, so they decided to take this way. Besides, they were tired of the strikes. You see, since the war began there has not been a single strike in Germany or Austria or Hungary. It is all owing to the war and the patriotism of the workmen."

He did not mention that the fact that any striker was instantly shot or hanged also did something towards discouraging strikes.

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One day he came to us jubilant with the news of the Austrian advance on the Piave.

"We have victoriously taken four thousand prisoners," he announced triumphantly.

When he had gone I said to Murray:

"I don't believe that advance was a success. If it was, they ought to have taken many more prisoners."

He agreed with me, and thus we cheered each other up as best we could.

The next day the communiqué, it seemed, was almost apologetic, and the following days made it quite clear that the Austrians had altogether failed in this attack. This was the first good news we had had since the disasters of March.

The old Colonel had told me that the prison now held 1,500 men although it was intended for 800, and as we passed along the corridors on our way in and out of it we could see that the cells were simply stacked with prisoners. Poor wretches, as we went by we caught glimpses of their gaunt faces peering out at us through the peep-holes in the cell doors. One day as we were walking up and down among the potatoes we were surprised to hear ourselves hailed in English.

"Good day, misters," a voice rang out.

We perceived that it came from the window of a cell, and when we drew near we saw a little Italian trying to lean out through the bars. He told us he had been a gardener employed by one Count Poniatovsky in Eastern Galicia. He had annoyed the Count in some way and had been clapped into prison for his pains. He told us that more than one Englishman and men of other nationalities were among the Count's employés as jockeys and grooms, etc., and that none of these

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were so much as interned; as their master was a very big man indeed, owning half Eastern Galicia, and employing over a thousand men on his estate.

Another day we were joined during our walk by a Croat officer who was in prison for some breach of regulations. He was in a very indignant and injured frame of mind and used to spend most of his time writing letters to the Ministry of War, to justify and defend the conduct for which he was being punished. He said that by military law it was permissible to disregard regulations in an emergency; and that he had done no more than was thus allowed. We saw a good deal of him from that time forward, and he was rather interesting to talk to. He talked interminably about Croatia and its beauties, and never tired of extolling the delights of his native chestnut groves and of the fat pigs that herded beneath them. Perhaps what thrilled us most in connection with him was that he was constantly sent quantities of delicious pastry from outside the prison; one day he gave us a huge slab. I shall never forget Murray's face on this occasion. It was no doubt a mirror of my own.

We told him some of our adventures, and he asked us why we did not get properly forged passports.

"You easily could have," he said. "Why, I daresay you could even get them in this prison. I should think you almost certainly could."

These scrapings of acquaintance did in some sort beguile our time till the happy day arrived when we were told that we were to be sent off to a camp the other side of Vienna. So we really were not to be sent back to Germany!

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No one who has not been in our predicament can imagine the relief we felt.

We were handed over to a very smart Hungarian officer who, however, only took us as far as the station. He told us he had been a prisoner with the Russians; and that when the Bolshevist revolution broke out he had escaped from Siberia and travelled by train a thousand miles disguised as a Russian private soldier. Near the frontier he had got out of the train, and rushed across in the snow, being fired at by the Bolshevists, but not hit. He looked so pleased with himself and so happy that we, who had hoped that our adventures would end as his had, felt newly depressed at meeting him.

At the station an Austrian took charge of us.

He was to take us the whole way to the camp, and was delighted at the prospect; for he had leave to stop in Vienna on his way back, and it was his native town. He was a law student who was now in the garrison at Przemysl, but who had seen a great deal of fighting on the Italian front. He talked incessantly, and told me he had been in and out of eleven battles on the Isonzo, where the trenches lay in and among the solid rock. He said that when a shell burst there it blew the rocks into thousands of tiny sharp pieces which flew a couple of hundred yards and were the cause of a terribly high percentage of eye wounds. He also expatiated on the joys of Vienna.

"The ladies there," he assured us, "are the most beautiful and the most attractive in the world!" And he described in greater detail one whom he hoped to see on his return. When we arrived, and were driving up to the camp, we passed quantities of wild flowers

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growing by the roadside, so I pointed them out to him, and said:

"You'd better get out and pick a posy to take to your young woman in Vienna."

"Oh, that would be no use," he laughed. "I have too many. I should want a cart."

The last twelve miles of the journey had to be done on foot. It was a pretty valley up which we wound our way, in the mountains of lower Austria, about one hundred kilometres west of Vienna. A stream ran down the middle of it and the road followed the course of the stream. The day was bright and sunny, so that before we had gone far we were all very hot and dusty and tired.

After a few kilometres we came to a small wayside inn.

"Let's go in and get a drink or something," I suggested to our Austrian officer, with whom by this time we were on the best of terms.

"Why," said he; "there's nothing to be had here. What do you expect to get in a place like this?"

"Oh," I said, "I don't know. Eggs perhaps, and milk; and very likely liqueurs."

"You won't get any of them," he scoffed.

"Leave that to me," said I; and in we went.

The inn was picturesque enough, with a large public room done up in the German fashion. Oak tables surrounded by oak benches stood here and there; and in the windows were deep seats of the same wood. A buxom young woman came and asked what we wanted.

"What have you to drink?" I asked, and she said she had some liqueurs. So we ordered some.

When she had brought them, and we had drunk her health and talked a little, I said to her:

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"What about something to eat? Can't you give us some eggs and milk?"

"Eggs!" she exclaimed, with rather exaggerated surprise. "I have no eggs."

"What are all those hens doing outside?" I asked; and gradually, after some talk and chaff, I persuaded her to relent; she produced what I asked for, and we had an excellent meal. Bread, and butter, even, were forthcoming; in short, delicacies none of us had set eyes on for a very long while. The Austrian was delighted and astonished.

"Never," he said, "should I have prevailed on her to give me these things, even though I am an officer in the Austrian Army!"

Presently there was a noise outside, and we saw a sort of wagonette drive up. It was empty, and the driver was talking to the man of our escort. He was evidently on his way up the valley.

"Look here," I said, "why shouldn't we drive the rest of the way in that machine?"

The Austrian protested.

"No, no," he said; "this is not a picnic. I have no orders that you should drive; and for myself I have no money to spare."

"Leave that to me," said I.

I had no money to spare either, and none was needed. A little conversation with the driver, such as I had had with the landlady, and the thing was arranged. We drove off in great style, and arrived at the camp in a jovial mood.

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CHAPTER XXXI

SHORTER COMMONS

After seeing the Commandant, who I regret to say did not make a very good impression on us, we walked into the camp and were not long before meeting familiar faces. Bevington and Gilchrist, Dobbs and Sloan, McLean and Grimwood, Moyle and Facer—we found all the escapers present, except for two who were caught in Germany soon after they started. Sorry though we were that our friends had not been more successful, we were delighted to see them. Murray especially, who had been able to speak to no one except me for five weeks, almost fell on their necks; but in the midst of our rejoicings we were seized by a disconcerting feeling that hearty though their greetings sounded, they were less hearty than our own. However, they certainly expressed pleasure at seeing us, and we were forthwith invited to a meal, of which we partook with great satisfaction.

In spite of this the odd feeling of discomfort continued; our talk grew more and more strained. I had a strange sensation that some burning topic was being avoided all the time. It was almost as if we were unwelcome.

Not till the repast was over did the truth appear. Then, at last, someone blurted out the horrid fact that even before any of the escapers arrived the camp had been fearfully short of food. The addition of the extra mouths made the question a burning one indeed.

It was really rather a funny situation if it had not been also such a serious one. There were we, a crowd

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of grown men, all unable to think of anything but one subject, all almost unable to care much about anything but our own constant hunger. The date on which parcels might be expected to arrive was the chief topic of conversation. The original prisoners, mainly officers of ships sunk by Austrian submarines, were most generous with the contents of theirs; and if it had not been for two or three of them, Captain Elliot, Captain Bedford, and Gore, an Australian who had joined the Royal Air Force, I daresay I should not have survived that time. Gore was a Queensland squatter, and no doubt had traditions of open-handedness. Evidently the traditions of the sea lead to an equal generosity. Elliot was the cook for the mess and must I should say have given nearly as much attention to the galley as to navigation when aboard ship; for his knowledge of pie was very thorough. He seemed positively to like cooking his own food for other people to eat. Bedford's strong point was that he ate less than most people, but always pressed others to have a second helping. I am not sure that there exists a more endearing trait than that of pressing other people to have a second helping.

These three lived in a big room overlooking the gate. Outside the room was a veranda peculiarly the domain of the fourth inhabitant of this household, Mike Moran, their orderly. Mike used to spend all the day washing up, or cleaning boots, or doing any other little odd jobs. He did most of them leaning up against the veranda post and, whenever possible, casting sheep's eyes at Bettie, the fair Austrian who did the Direktor's washing. It was the least disinterested courtship that ever was, and led to all sorts of alleviations of Mike's lot.

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I must say I hung round that veranda a great deal more than my pride would have permitted if it had had things more its own way. Gore used to come outside, cast a look at me, and call over his shoulder:

"Elliot, here's that damned fellow Phillimore hanging about. Lock up the cupboard."

This was a good sign, for after this sort of remark he generally invited me in to have a snack.

It was really very hard to keep away from the neighbourhood of food.

These people, very jovial, very kind people, very rich in parcels, had also the most marvellous foraging gifts; I believe they knew where every potato grew that was planted within a mile of the camp, and they knew of every quarter-pound trout that was tricked out of the stream.

Besides this, and possibly through their lines of communication, Mike and Bettie, they always knew what consignment of supplies had been received by the Direktor.

Salzerbad, as the camp was called, was a place that had seen better days, or at all events at one time had hoped to. Some thirty years ago it was discovered that a spring, that gushed from its rocks, contained properties akin to those of other springs which had in other localities attracted invalids from far and near to drink thereof and be restored to health. The owners of land in the remote little valley were thrilled. Why should not Salzerbad also acquire fame, and bring money as well as renown to its owners? A syndicate was formed; the waters were advertised; a row of villas was built, and fortunes were confidently awaited. Alas, they never came. The nearest approach to good

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luck that ever befell the settlement was when it was chosen as the site of a prisoners' camp.

The unoccupied villas were at last inhabited by officers of the Allied Armies. The secretary of the Baths became the Direktor of the camp, and in the swimming bath of the établissement, if the weather had been passably warm, would have splashed at last the long expected bathers.

It was not from our point of view an ideal place for a camp. The same causes which had hampered its success as a watering-place tended to make it unpopular in its latest rôle. The villas we lived in were a dismal row of houses facing due north; from their walls the plaster hung in damp strips; from their windows the outlook on the opposite wall of the valley was gloomy in the extreme. The climate was, no doubt, as good as that enjoyed in England on many a summer's day; pouring torrents of rain were its most marked feature. It never seemed to stop; every morning we woke to the same drizzling downpour; and it was cold too. The swimming pool would have been delightful if it had been warm, but as it was there was scarcely a week altogether during which even the most hardened cared to use it. Near it were some tiny plots of land where we made gardens. I managed to get hold of two or three plots and had an ambitious garden which suffered from the drawback that nothing ever grew in it. One of the plots that I took over from a Russian already had a complete potato plant flourishing in the middle of it. I dug it up, I grieve to say, rather before it was ready, but there were four potatoes on it. I somehow got hold of a packet of seeds, and sowed all sorts of vegetables; among them spinach, which did

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rather well. The soil was practically non-existent. I used to go round the camp begging for ashes from my friends' fires, and with these I carefully essayed to fertilize the rock. They were generally soon washed away by the perpetual rain; but a few of my seeds did come up. Some very weedy carrots and one broad bean appeared; I watched over them like a mother over her only child, especially the bean; great were my rejoicings when it actually flowered and went on to form a pod; but the effort was more than it could sustain, and having got so far it expired.

In the middle of the garden-plot stood a post, and on the post a small box. In this lived a tame sparrow, the pet of one of the French officers.

The gardens were a great meeting-place, and the scene of much international chaff and wit.

The camp was surrounded by the usual barbed wire, but we were allowed to go for walks on parole, and though I believe there was some idea that we should stick to the roads, in practice we were able to roam about the country in any direction. As a result we scoured it pretty thoroughly in search of food.

There was very little to be found. The Russians had had this parole leave to walk out for some time already, and they had long ago exploited this privilege to its utmost and explored every available nook and cranny whence supplies might conceivably be drawn. They had made friends, if possible, with every farmer or owner of chickens within the radius of several miles from the camp, and were accustomed, by making themselves useful to these people, to receive some sort of *quid pro quo* in the way of odds and ends of eatables. They took their clothes out, also, and exchanged them

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by degrees, for the same ends. The poor wretches were in a starving state; they received no parcels, and the rations allowed us by the Austrians were not enough to keep body and soul together.

Like everyone else I did a great deal of food-hunting, but for the most part the people, even if they had any, were not at all keen to sell it.

There was one woman, the daughter of a yeoman farmer and married to a Captain in the Austrian Army, a fact of which she was very proud, who often let me have spare vegetables; and there was another from whom we could get coffee, and milk with it, as she kept a cow. After a time her store of coffee gave out, but it was marvellous that she should have had as much as she did.

One day I had the luck to find some men fishing in the stream, and to see them catch several trout. I fell into talk with them and found that they were commercial travellers taking a holiday. Soon I discovered that one of them represented a firm in Vienna with which I had been accustomed to have business dealings before the war. He fell on my neck at this point, and presented me with no fewer than four beautiful trout. What a feast!

The wife of the Austrian Captain and I became rather friends. She was apparently very fond of her Captain, and was fearfully anxious about him as he had been sent to the French Front where, of course, at this time terrific fighting was taking place. When at last the Armistice was declared, and I was wandering about the village nearly beside myself with joy at the end of the war, at our having won it, and at being no longer a prisoner, I called at her house; and although

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the terms imposed on the Austrians were of the hardest, she was in almost as great a state of delight as I was myself. We executed a joy dance round her kitchen.

But not yet did that day arrive.

CHAPTER XXXII

ALLIED ADVENTURES

MEANWHILE the rain continued to fall; the clouds set darkly upon the flanks of the hills; food continued to be the first consideration of our daily thoughts, and continued to afford a proof that absence really does sometimes make the heart grow fonder. Perhaps heart is hardly the word. . . .

In August winter set in for good. We were not provided by the Austrians with any fuel, even for cooking purposes, but there was a saw-mill up the valley where we were allowed to collect the outer shavings of the sawn trees—pieces of bark and scraps of wood. It took an endless amount of these to keep fires going, and we were obliged to fetch them in the local handcarts, and to haul them painfully through the village and up the slope to the camp. It seemed *infra dig.* for British officers to do this heavy work under the eyes of the peasants; but it had to be done. When we arrived, our thoughts flew at once to new schemes for escaping, but the local difficulties were so great as to be almost insurmountable. It was a most hopeless place to leave. In order to get anywhere at all we should have had to cross whole ranges of mountains. I never realized

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before that the Alps run unbroken from France to Vienna.

Two of the French officers had escaped from Germany, where they were before I arrived. They had had curious adventures.

These two, by name Michal and Stoll, had intended to climb through the Alps into Switzerland. Michal was the son of a General, and was an officer in the Chasseurs Alpins. He was an ardent mountaineer, and had done a great deal of Alpine climbing. He knew of a pass over the frontier so difficult that it was unguarded, yet quite practicable to a mountaineer of his experience. Stoll was doubtful of his own capacity in that respect, but Michal had enough confidence for two. He was sure that a man so brave as his friend (and never was there a much braver man) and one who spoke German so perfectly—Stoll was an Alsatian—would be certain to make the attempt a success. Accordingly they got out of Fort 9, no matter exactly how, and after no extraordinary adventures arrived in the chain of mountains leading to the pass.

Remote, at the head of a high valley, stood a hut erected by the Austrian Alpine Club for the use of climbers. It was shuttered and desolate; evidently no one had been near it since the war put a stop to the vagaries of such people as, under no impact of necessity but merely for their pleasure, are in the habit of scaling snow-clad peaks.

Michal and Stoll were tired out, and had a hard day before them on the morrow; the prospect of a good night's rest beneath a roof was very inviting. Without much difficulty they prized open a shutter and got

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inside. They replaced the shutter, ate some food, lay down and had the good night's rest as per programme.

Next morning they were awakened by a knock on the door. Staring at each other in dismay, they remained silent and motionless, not knowing what to do, and hoping the intruder would give up and go away. But the knocking continued; and voices outside showed that more than one person was there. The fugitives decided to let in the strangers and to attempt to carry off the position as best they could. They got up and opened the door. Outside, a man attended by two guides carrying ropes and alpenstocks was waiting. Evidently another climbing party.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Stoll said. "My friend Schwartz and I are trying to rest our minds from the war by spending our leave climbing. We are officers in the Imperial Army and have shell-shock leave. Won't you come in?"

"Indeed," answered the principal man of the little party on the threshold, looking at them very suspiciously. "That is curious. I am an officer of the K. und K. Army."

So saying, he came into the hut, and prepared to make himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit, while the guides began to cook his breakfast.

The two Frenchmen were appalled, but resolute in braving it out. Stoll did most of the talking, but Michal spoke German very well indeed for a foreigner, and the Austrian, though plainly extremely suspicious, equally plainly could not quite make up his mind whether they were impostors or not. It was lucky that Michal was an accomplished mountaineer, as the talk turned almost entirely on climbing, and without hints

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from his partner Stoll would soon have been out of his depth. As it was, their visitor hovered between distrust and confidence for the greater part of the day, till late in the afternoon he rather suddenly abandoned his suspicions completely, and took the two to his heart. This, if anything, was more disconcerting than his former attitude; for he now declared that the two parties must join forces; and nothing would content him but that they should all make the ascent of a peak different from that contemplated by my friends. It appeared that he was more or less an amateur, and he was so much impressed with the tales of mountaineering feats performed by Michal that he showed a burning wish to make an ascent in his company. He must have felt that this was the chance of his life to see how an experienced alpinist would tackle a stiff climbing problem.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish. There was nothing for it, however, but to consent, as the Austrian would take no denial. He insisted on accompanying them back to the nearest town, where he entertained them to a royal repast, and they spent a very festive evening. At last they managed to make some excuse to get out of the hotel. As soon as they were out of sight they made a bee line for the open country, and were very soon clear away, hidden beyond recall on the trackless side of the mountain. This time they reached the pass without further mishap; but here the snowy verges of the precipices were too much for Stoll's head, and presently they came to a point where, not only was he giddy, but his strength failed as well; one way and another he was able to go no further, and they had to come back. They retraced their steps, meaning

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to try another route, but were caught and sent to Salzerbad.

Here Stoll escaped again, by a method which was kept a complete secret. He made his way to the Rhine where it forms the frontier of the Vorarlberg, intending to swim it. But when he had struggled as far as its banks it was only to find that the river was coming down in spate, with its waters surging wildly among great rocks in a seething torrent. The swollen blackness of the flood; the white and angry-looking foam that it carried on its waves as it swirled onward; the roar with which its waters dashed themselves against the rocks that, dotted about the bed of the stream, impeded its free passage—all these, for Stoll, took on the ghostly shape of the ubiquitous board bearing the word "Verboten," which here by some oversight was not to be seen.

With a heavy heart he obeyed the admonition, and went sadly back to the nearest Austrian prison camp for private soldiers. There, since his provisions were all exhausted, he gave himself up as a private.

He meant to stay there till he could collect enough supplies to have another try, and he knew that if he could pass as a private he would have a much better chance of getting away, as they had more opportunity of escaping than the more jealously guarded officers.

But in the camp was a Russian soldier who had previously seen him at Salzerbad, and this man, on recognizing him, sold the information of his identity to the Austrians. He was sent back to do his solitary confinement at Salzerbad, while the Russians got hold of the traitor and nearly finished him off.

I much preferred the Austrians to the Germans.

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They were courteous and kindly as a general thing, and bore no one much ill will, whether friend or foe. Great efforts had been made by the Germans to induce their Allies to feel as they did themselves on the subject of the war, and to make them join in the Gott-strafing that flourished so luxuriantly in the congenial atmosphere of the Vaterland. But the efforts were not conspicuously successful. The Austrians, ever ready to oblige, no doubt did their best to raise a Hate; but it was too much trouble, and their natural kindliness being all against it, they soon thrust the idea aside and seldom bothered to take it out and air it.

On the other hand, they had their faults. It simply did not occur to them to tell the truth if it seemed pleasanter to do otherwise. Having listened with every sign of sympathy to a well-justified complaint, they would promise redress at the earliest possible date, and then banish the matter completely from their thoughts. They would promise practically anything, but without the remotest intention of keeping their word. They were also less honest than the Germans. Our parcels were always being stolen, and at no time had we needed them more sorely.

There were not many linguists in the camp. One man named Bevington, who was a very good German scholar, was always in request as interpreter when our senior officer had an interview with the Commandant for the purpose of protesting against these thefts, or of lodging some protest or other. The senior officer would make his complaint, and Bevington would translate it into forcible German, putting perhaps more forcibleness into it than it had had in English.

The Commandant used to become very peevish and

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irritable, and would exclaim over and over again: "I can't bear this young man, I can't have him here. I can't bear him. He does not speak properly to me."

Bevington, however, who was young and pugnacious, took a malicious delight in annoying him, and was none too polite. After a time the Commandant really could not bear it any longer and clapped him into cells. We all thereupon went on strike, and he was let out again. I was then elected as interpreter. My German was not good, but no one else knew any at all. "I can't speak German," I protested to the Commandant. "I can understand it, but I can't talk it."

"That doesn't matter," he replied. "You know how you should speak to me."

So I became interpreter.

We used to strike by refusing to come to *Appell*. The guard and its officers would appear on parade at the usual hour to find none of the prisoners present. On the contrary, they were to be seen at every window, looking gleefully out at the Austrians, who would wait in the rain for some time and then go away. The next day, however, when the same thing happened, the guard would be sent to find and bring out the delinquents. We would hide ourselves away all over the place in the furthest corners of the camp, and not till discovered by the guard and treated to some threatening of the bayonet did we step forth and fall into our ranks.

All this took a long time and annoyed everyone excessively. One severe strike on the question of parcel stealing went on for so long that at last a General came up from Vienna and saw for himself the method we were employing. We were allowed to state our case to

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him, and instead of flying into a fury of passion as a German certainly would have, he listened quietly and went away without saying anything.

He must have thought we had a good case, for soon afterwards we were told that a guard would in future be sent to the frontier to receive and fetch back our parcels, so that they should not come through the Austrian post. This was done, and things got better for a bit, but soon relapsed to their former condition.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TIDE TURNS

Dobbs, Murray, McLean, and some others had a plan for escaping, on which, for my part, I looked with no favourable eye. I thought it a thoroughly bad plan and doomed to failure from the first.

The idea was this. Every day a cart came into the camp to collect and remove rubbish. It was brought up by a guard who was armed, and let in through a side gate in the wire by another armed guard who kept the key. Those who were enthusiastic about the scheme meant to overpower the two guards at the moment when the cart was passing through the gate, disarm them, and make a run for it along a couple of hundred yards of open valley to a point where some trees offered a prospect of cover. From there they hoped to get clear away and eventually escape through Hungary to Roumania. As the sentries who were placed at intervals along the wire would have them in full view most of the way from the gate to the trees, and would

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presumably be shooting at them while they traversed that space; and as, hampered by their heavy packs, the escapers were not likely to make a world record over the distance, it seemed to me odds on the sentries. However, they refused to be dissuaded, and deputed to me the job of distracting one of the sentries. It was plain that the attention of these last must be held at the critical moment if the escapers were to have any chance at all.

Accordingly, when all was ready, the chosen band of distractors sallied forth to take up their duties at their various posts, I being allotted one at about a hundred yards from the gate, where the sentry, an oldish man, was yawning away his hours of duty. At this point the wire turned a corner of the camp, and if only I could beguile old Ludwig to take a step or two to the right he would be almost out of sight of the road down which the escapers must make their bolt.

I approached him from the far side, and when I drew near came to a standstill by the inner wire. Calling out a "Good-day," I began to make conversation.

"Have you heard the news?" I said.

He turned towards me inquiringly. "What news?"

"About the revolution," said I. "Haven't you heard?"

He shook his head.

"A revolution has broken out in Vienna," I told him. "The Socialists have risen and seized the munition works."

I went on talking, inventing every kind of story I could think of that might interest him; but he was a dull old man, and my feverish imaginings did not seem

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to thrill him as they should have. I piled on the agony till he did at last wake up a bit and begin to take an interest. I was talking against time, with one eye on my watch and with a nasty foreboding that when zero struck I should have come to the end of my subject.

"Will you have a cigarette?" I asked presently. And I threw him one so that it fell a little short, and he had to take a step forward to pick it up. I went on with my tales as he smoked, straining my ears the while for sounds from the gateway. Soon I heard them; loud sounds; their meaning to me obvious as the day. It seemed impossible to hope that Ludwig would not recognize that a scuffle was going on. In desperation I pulled out my cigarette-case.

"Have another?" I cried, and threw one towards him again.

It landed in the space between the inner and outer lines of wire, but near enough to him to be within reach of a well-stretched arm. He went down on his hands and knees, and extending his arm through the wire was just able to touch the end and coax it towards him with the tips of his fingers.

The hubbub round the corner rose, fell, was hushed, and died away. It was maddening not to be able to rush to the corner and see what had happened.

After waiting a few minutes longer, still talking, rather at random now, but giving the sentry no time to turn his slow mind from me, I left him and went back to find out how the affair had gone.

The party had got away all right. As soon as the gate was unlocked McLean and Murray had flung themselves upon the guard who was leading the horse, and had snatched his rifle away from him. Meanwhile

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the other couple was trying to do the same with the second guard; but this man was of a stouter sort and not to be disarmed so easily. Dobbs was a big man, and had no time to be very gentle with him, but he clung resolutely to his rifle, and it was not till they knocked him over and began to stamp on his hands that he would let go of it. At last they got it from him and made off after the others. All the sentries had been efficiently dealt with and had noticed nothing. I remember well the very peculiar way in which old Ludwig looked at me next time he met me!

A couple of hours afterwards there arose a commotion near the gate; looking out we saw the guards who had followed the escapers returning with the first two, whom they had recaptured. McLean, realizing the uselessness of resisting, and further, that the guards were doing no more than their duty, was coming quietly enough, but Murray was making a great fuss about it, loudly abusing the guards, who were urging him along. Suddenly I saw him hang back, apparently refusing to be hurried; whereupon one of the guards turned on him fiercely and bayoneted him. It was sickening to see the nasty, rusty bayonet go right into my friend's thigh.

I ran along the bars of my accursed cage roaring at the guard, who shouted back defiance, but looked rather scared.

I rushed off and forced my way to the Commandant's presence. There I demanded a doctor, and told him freely what I thought of such behaviour. The Austrians, I think, were rather frightened by the whole incident. They produced the doctor, who went off to find Murray, but found him in such a rage that

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he refused to have his wound looked to, and in fact denied that there was anything the matter. This, of course, was very pleasing to the Austrians, if scarcely so much so to the rest of us.

Dobbs and his partner got away successfully, and eventually crossed the frontier into Hungary, which by this time was almost having a side war of its own with Austria. They were caught, however, in a train, and sent back to Salzerbad. Dobbs told me that the officer who arrested them said to him:

"It's a pity that you did not wait till this day fortnight, when our revolution is due."

Sure enough, it was on that day fortnight that the Hungarian revolution broke out.

One day a Frenchman who had been taken in the Ukraine was brought into the camp. He loudly protested against his capture, as he said that Russia was a neutral country, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty having ended the war as far as that country was concerned. I soon found that the other French prisoners looked on him with a good deal of suspicion, and heard from Michal that though he gave out privately that he was a member of the French Secret Service, no one believed it. In the meantime the French section of the officers were being electrified by tales he let fall of the most astounding adventures among the Bolshevists and elsewhere. Some of these were retailed to me; among them I remember was one to the effect that he had organized the blowing up of the arsenal at Kieff; a gigantic enterprise which might be compared to blowing up Woolwich arsenal, the explosions lasting for days.

I, of course, looked on these stories with as little or

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less confidence as did his compatriots. Great was my astonishment, therefore, when one day Michal came to me and said:

"It's all right about that fellow—he's genuine."

"Think so?" I asked, without much conviction.

"I know it," he assured me; but I remained sceptical, and turned aside with a laugh, which I suppose annoyed him, for he burst out:

"I will prove it to you. Come with me."

He led me away to his room, and there, with many precautions, such as closing the shutters and barricading the door, he showed me a sliding panel in the wall, beautifully contrived in the wooden lining of the room. He slid it open, displaying behind it a recess he had hollowed in the brickwork. In it he kept his few treasures: some excellent maps, which he afterwards allowed me to study, and the particular object he had brought me to see, which was a passport made out in the name of our latest and hitherto highly suspected arrival.

Having had a good deal to do with forged documents, I saw at once that this was a genuine article. It was covered with visas and endorsements from margin to margin. I noticed the signature of our Ambassador at Petrograd among twenty others. After examining it, I could only agree with Michal that there was no doubt the man was an important Secret Service agent, and I was accordingly properly impressed.

I did not know very many of the Russian prisoners. One of them, a Lett, interested me very much, partly because he was the only Lett I ever met in my life, and partly by his enormous energy, which must have arrested the attention of everyone.

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He was the son of a small farmer, barely educated; able, before the war, to read and speak Russian and perhaps some German, but otherwise totally ignorant. Yet this man had since his imprisonment undergone a course of study, mapped out and undertaken entirely in accordance with his own ideas and with very little help from other people, which would have been a strenuous one in any centre of light and learning in any country in the world.

A huge fellow with the gaunt and bony framework of a half-starved Lettish peasant, his mind cried out for food even more loudly than his body must have; for while all other Russians spent every available moment of the day in the hunt for provisions, he would go out for only a few hours daily, and devote the remaining daylight to the higher mathematics, or some such poor substitute for a dinner. He and I gave each other lessons in German and English, and he used to borrow from me the longest and most classical books we could provide from our little library—that is to say, the accumulated and pooled literature of the British officers.

The amount of reading he could get through was something prodigious. I can only imagine that so much energy was the result of the appalling climate in which he had been bred. No doubt in the cold parts of the earth, individuals lacking an abnormal amount of vitality quickly die off, and a race is eventually produced which develops endurance and energy to a very high degree. When transferred to easier conditions, members of such a race would be likely to surprise those among whom they appeared; just as, for our part, we semi-Northerners can put more ginger

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into our proceedings than the natives of climates still warmer than our merely temperate one. In the same way, the probability that not only he, but his forefathers unto many generations, had seldom known what it was to have a square meal in their lives, may have accounted for his being able to live on the entirely inadequate rations he did exist on at Salzerbad.

There was another Russian, by name Popoff, who amazed me for the almost exactly opposite reason. Amidst the crowd of scarecrows that we were, he alone never seemed to dwindle in bulk. Indeed, he actually appeared to grow fat, and how he did it was a constant source of wonder to me. I became rather friendly with him, and one day I asked him point-blank how it was that he managed to put on flesh when we were all so hungry.

"Oh," said he airily. "I have plenty to eat. My wives get it for me."

"Your—what?" I asked, staring at him.

"My wives," he repeated simply, yet with a certain pride.

"Oh," said I. "Have you more than one?" I inquired.

"Dear, yes!" he answered. "Seven or eight. When I find a good hard-working woman who looks like taking proper care of a husband, I always marry her if I can. Then she collects food for me and mends my clothes and sees to it that I want for nothing. I have two or three in this neighbourhood."

The plan certainly seemed to have its advantages.

Popoff was an actor, and, so he assured me, a very good actor, and very popular with the Moscow audiences.

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"What will you do after the war?" I asked him one day. "You won't be able to go back to Moscow while the Bolshevists reign there, I suppose?"

"Why not?" said he. "People always want to be amused, whatever their politics. As long as I can amuse them I shall be quite safe."

He made me think of the jester at a mediæval court.

A man I particularly loathed was Georg, one of our guards. He was the worst type of socialist and revolutionist, and revelled in enlarging upon his disgusting ideals of blood and anarchy. These he recounted to me under the impression, which was too deep-seated to be eradicated, that England being a democratic country, all Englishmen must applaud and share his creed. "Not much longer," he would assure me with many mysterious nods and winks, "not for many more days shall the tyrant who calls himself Kaiser and König of this down-trodden land continue to fatten on the blood and sweat of the People! The hours are few till the People, on the contrary, shall baptize their Freedom in his blood, and that of all aristocrats and capitalists."

One day he went a step too far.

"How is it," he asked me, "that England, the home and fountain-head of democracy, continues to tolerate a Royal Family? Why does your country not rise and destroy George, who has already sat an unaccountable time in the seat of the oppressor? I cannot understand it, but no doubt England only waits till the hour strikes in order to free herself from this reproach."

After that, Georg had to do without the pleasure of my conversation. He had not long to wait for the hour

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he looked forward to. The Hungarian revolution broke out punctually on the day announced by the officer who had arrested Dobbs.

Events hurried one upon another. Count Tisza, the Prime Minister, the great ally of Kaiser Wilhelm, was brutally murdered before the eyes of his wife. Hungary declared itself an independent country, and the Emperor Karl, in a vain effort to stave off the approaching catastrophe, began hastily to issue, from Vienna, edicts granting autonomy to the Czechs and to Austrian Poland. In the meantime, lawlessness of various kinds developed with great rapidity, and, all over Austria, the keepers of the forests and great sporting estates which abounded throughout the country were being shot down in a wholesale fashion by murderous ruffians acting under a pretext of patriotism.

It was said, and I believe with truth, that not less than 150,000 deserters from the Austrian Army were living the life of outlaws in the big forests of the Austrian Empire.

They were known as the "Green Army," and swooped down from time to time on villages and small towns.

Meanwhile, with the help of the Allies, the Serbians had freed their country and were on the point of crossing the Danube and invading Austrian territory. This terrified the Austrians more than anything else. They had a holy terror of the Serbs. The Hungarian sergeant in Przemysl gaol, who had fought against them in 1914, told me in so many words that one Serb was worth twenty of his own men.

Almost simultaneously the British began their great

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attack on the Piave. It was immediately successful, and within twenty-four hours of its start deserters from that front were back in the villages around Salzerbad.

Intense excitement reigned in the camp. The first sign we had of the state of affairs beginning with the Viennese revolution which quickly followed on the Allied victories was the appearance of the Hungarian sentries with little bits of red stuff fixed to the front of their caps, so as to cover the Imperial K. u. K. which normally adorned them.

Next day the Czechs, having already been granted autonomy by Vienna, left in a body, thereby reducing the guard by a score of men. I asked one of them where he was going to, and what he meant to do.

"I shall go straight back to my home," he said. "We are a free nation now and can all go and look after our farms in peace."

The next day the Poles went. The day after, the Ruthenians followed suit.

By this time revolution was in full swing. It was a bloodless affair, and comprised little besides proclamations and a general abandoning of all work in hand. Committees of workmen arose all over the place, and the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the Socialist newspaper, fairly let itself go; but beyond these manifestations, nothing startling happened.

In the camp the remaining sentries clustered in excited groups to talk over the situation instead of doing sentry-go; the prisoners still more excitedly discussed their prospects of release. The Armistice was to be looked for at any moment, and almost at once came the news that it was a *fait accompli*.

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There arose the burning question as to who among us was to go, and who to be left behind.

A certain number of the prisoners, from wounds, age, or illness, were not fit to walk. There seemed little or nothing to stop the rest of us from openly leaving the camp and making our way across the frontier; but if we did that, were the weak to be abandoned to their fate, which would very likely be starvation if the Austrians repudiated further responsibility for their care? Or was someone to stay behind and take charge of them? If so, who?

Hours were spent in disputing on this subject; most of the fit arguing that it was the first duty of a British officer to rejoin his unit, while the poor unfit could only stand by and listen in alarm and dismay while their fate was discussed. In the midst of one of these conferences, a message was brought that the canteen corporal had been elected president of the Salzerbad Soldiers' and Workmen's Council, and wished to see the senior British, French and Russian officers.

Accordingly, these three with their interpreters repaired to the Commandant's office.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WE MIX WITH DEMOCRATS

The first person we saw when we went in was the Austrian adjutant, who was sitting on the edge of a stool, his face white with fear, as he had no idea what was going to happen to him.

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The newly elected President of the Soldiers' and Workmen's Council was waiting for us at the Commandant's desk.

He greeted us with a mixture of embarrassment and defiance, and at once burst into a long speech, compiled practically word for word from leading articles in the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, as I, a "constant reader," immediately recognized.

"Fifthly and lastly," said he (though as a matter of fact he went on long after that to about fortiethly), "you, the Allies, have always given out that this war is a war undertaken to free the world for democracy. We, of the Austrian States, have now become entirely democratic, so that you must admit that there is no longer any bone of contention between us, and we look to you to back us up and do your best to help us by every means in your power. I am sure you will begin by joining with me when I cry 'Long Live Democracy!' "

"Quite so. Hear, hear," we assented. "Long Live Democracy by all means. And now what train can we leave by?"

"The train service is much disorganized," he replied. "There can be no question of trains at present. In the meantime I look to you to save us the trouble of continuing to guard you, by giving me your parole, and the parole of all the prisoners, that none of you will attempt to escape, but remain quietly here for the present and give me your support in establishing those great principles of equality that you as democrats must have at heart."

"Exactly," we returned. "There is nothing we value more highly than those principles to which you refer;

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but it is certainly the case that our presence in our respective countries is urgently necessary so that it may be known to all how strongly democratic you have become. We must really tear ourselves away. When can we have a train to take us from you? At once, if not sooner, will suit us best."

He began to get irritable, not to say peevish, at this harping of ours on one string. "There are no trains," he snapped; "already a lot of Russian prisoners have broken out and filled the trains in spite of all orders. They have been fired on in consequence, and there have been thousands of casualties. Instead of helping me, you ask for what is impossible." And he looked rather inclined to cry.

As a matter of fact, as we discovered later, there was some foundation for what he said, except that the casualties numbered twenty instead of thousands.

Next day, November 5th, was a day of restless anxiety.

Overnight we had been told that the canteen corporal and the Commandant (a strange conjunction!) had gone off together to Vienna to see what could be done about a train for us.

In the morning the unfortunate Sloan, who was the senior British officer, was besieged by his impatient fellow prisoners, eager to know what had been settled; so he and I went round to see if the envoys had returned. There we found a very weary-looking canteen corporal and a Commandant apparently restored to his former authority.

It was an interesting and curious example of the way in which, when leadership is wanted, it almost inevitably comes back to the man bred to it. The

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Commandant was no great shakes, but it was clear that the canteen corporal recognized in him the possession of superior power greater than any he could assume; and he turned to it instinctively as soon as he himself began to get out of his depth.

The day before it had been all Soldiers' and Workmen's Council, and the Commandant may go and drown himself, but no sooner did we begin to worry them and it dawned on them that we were not going to give our parole and make everything easy for them, than it was "Please, Commandant, come to Vienna with us, and put things straight." Anyhow, we found that it was again he with whom we had to deal when we went to his office that morning.

"Well, have you got a train for us?" we said.

"*Ach*, quite impossible! You have no idea of the awful congestion of the railways and the *furchtbare Erbitterung unserer Truppen. Unmöglich Sie ins Blau zu senden.*" This, with many variations, was the burden of his song.

The picture that he painted of the defeated and humiliated troops pouring back to their homes was not an exhilarating one; and we were obliged to withdraw in the end without any more satisfactory reply, just as we had on the previous day.

To divert our thoughts from this disappointment, a football match was now indulged in; but several of the spectators appeared on the ground carrying packs, and after the match they melted away and we in Salzerbad saw them no more.

Our old friends Murray and McLean popped off a little later in the evening, and after prodigious marches, some little hardship and a few adventures, succeeded

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in reaching Trieste on the same day as we did. Duval, Stoll, and Michal also vanished away, and after a short march were able to get on a train which carried them down into Jugoslavia, till at length it reached the zone of the retreating armies, where they were obliged to leave it. Soon after this, as they were walking down a road, they met a couple of officers of the Austrian Army, riding along, fully armed, but minus their men. The three Frenchmen stopped them, made them get off their horses, disarmed them, and rode on into Trieste, mounted on Austrian chargers and brandishing Austrian revolvers. Rather a pleasant manner of leaving an enemy country.

Next morning again we could get "Nichts bestimmt" from the canteen corporal. Our tempers began to go. I thought it was time to make a demonstration of some sort. Just by the gate I saw a cart loaded with rifles and bayonets, the weapons of the departed members of the guard, which were being taken down to the mayor of the village to be stored in a place of safety.

I told the man who was leading the horse to stop, and he did so with amusing docility.

I beckoned to two or three orderlies who were near by, and called to some officers who were standing not far off to come to the cart. They came, and I began taking out the arms and dealing them round. Pretty soon the canteen corporal was informed by someone of what was going on, and he arrived in a very heated state.

"Put down those rifles!" said he hotly.

"Not at all," I replied. "It is far better that we should be armed. We must protect ourselves, and you tell me that Austria is in a very dangerous condition."

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"Put them down," he repeated. "They are no good to you, anyhow, without ammunition."

"We have the bayonets," I protested.

"Nonsense," said he, "that sentry over there can shoot the whole lot of you in a few seconds." And he seized the rifle I was holding and tried to take it from me by force.

Things had gone far enough; if I had not known the man, I should not have let them go so far.

"If I were not a very calm and sensible man," I said, "I should now probably run you through with this bayonet. As it is, I will put it down." So saying, I replaced the weapon on the cart and the rest of us did the same.

The whole proceeding was perhaps rather silly, but I think it had some effect. Not long afterwards a message came up from the station-master at Hainfeld to say that there would be four railway coaches ready for us at Hainfeld station on the 12.2 train the following morning.

We heard nothing on the subject from anyone else. No orders of any kind were given us; we received no message from the Commandant, or from anyone else. The only sign of preparation was an issue of new boots to the guard; this being, I think, an effort on the part of the little adjutant to placate it, new boots having been officially non-existent in Austria for a year past. Seeing that the next move was being left to us, we set out and scoured the countryside for means of transport. During the course of the afternoon we obtained the promise of enough wagonettes of one kind and another to take us down next morning to the station, a distance of some twelve kilometres. Then

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arose the question of what we were to do with our food.

It so happened that just before the Armistice, the frantic efforts we had been making to get supplies had borne fruit, and we had received quantities almost greater than our wildest hopes had contemplated. Expecting, as we were, a battle, after which a certain number of British prisoners would probably be brought in, and thinking moreover that half the parcels would be stolen as usual, we had asked for more to be sent than we ever thought would arrive, and to our astonishment the whole consignment had come through intact. The result was that we had in hand a tremendous store, and we felt very conscience-stricken at the idea of abandoning it. However, it was out of the question to take it with us, so we thought the best thing to do would be to sell it. I and Sloan went first to the Direktor, but he was too keen on a bargain; and after some haggling on his part we left him and went down to the village to offer our goods to the mayor, the owner of one of the saw-mills, and an honest, straight fellow.

I said to him: "You will have a hard time this winter. The potatoes are already nearly finished; it will be months before the railways recover from their disorganization, and you know there is no corn in the country. This is a fine opportunity for stocking the village, as these stores of ours will about carry you over the winter."

He quite saw the force of my remarks, and said at once that he would take all we had. Later in the evening he came up to the camp; and for hours he and I counted biscuits and tins, fixing the prices as we went.

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Next morning two large wagons arrived to take the stores, and I had only time to get them loaded up, all the time wondering whether the mayor, now he had got the goods, really meant to pay for them or not, before the last wagonette was ready to start for the station. Then the mayor honestly paid me the agreed price, twenty-eight thousand *kronen*, I think, which later on we duly handed over to the Red Cross in England.

The Commandant and his wife turned up to say good-bye. He looked extremely gloomy and wretched, and one could not help being very sorry for him. Poor old man, he had been fifty years in the army; and now, here was his Kaiser gone, his army dissolved, his job gone, his pension gone, his country defeated.

He was always well-mannered and courteous, and they said good-bye to us very pleasantly. It was rather as if they were the hosts at some country house, and we departing visitors. We in our turn wished them luck and made polite conversation; and when the lady said something about the terrible scarcity of food in the countryside, it struck me to say to her:

"I don't know if you care to have my little garden after I've left?"

She seemed to think she would, so I took her and showed her the three or four tiny plots I had cultivated, pointing out my row of spinach and my one cabbage, which was about all there was; and she thanked me and took careful note of these poor exhibits. That she should be so grateful for so little was a rather pathetic proof of the prevailing lack of food of any sort.

Off we drove, merrily enough, shouting, as we went,

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good-byes to the Lustige Witwe and to Julia, Maria, Anna, and all the rest of the people who lived down the valley, whom by this time we had grown to know pretty well.

When we arrived at the station we found, partly to our amusement and partly to our dismay, that the only escort provided for us by the Commandant, in spite of his terror of sending us "into the blue," was one corporal who was going a bit of the journey with us, as it was on his way home. Our only other acquaintance of any kind at the station was Mike's Bettie, the Direktor's laundress. Mike was a good deal chaffed about the length and tenderness of her farewell.

Hainfeld itself remained absolutely calm and uninterested, and it looked as if the journey would be less eventful than might have been expected in a country which was in the throes of a revolution.

CHAPTER XXXV

WE TRAVEL THROUGH CHAOS

After a long delay we steamed off and presently reached a junction, Leobersdorf, I think. Here we came to a stop, and had plenty of leisure to observe that the revolution had somewhat dislocated the ordinary routine. The station was full of Boy Scouts who had been armed and made to take the place of the Imperial Police, now disbanded or unavailable. A train overtook and passed us, crammed with men who, like us, were leaning out of every window; and with them we exchanged questions. Though surprised at

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seeing us in our foreign uniforms, they seemed to have no feelings of an antagonistic kind, and were merely curious.

"Who are you?" we asked in our turn.

"Slovenes and Italians, dismissed from the Viennese munition factories," was the account they gave of themselves.

"We are on our way home."

Here the two coaches containing the Russians were uncoupled from our train and went off without us, their route being naturally a different one from ours. They were not in the high spirits the rest of us were bursting with, and no wonder. We never heard of any of them again; and I have reason to fear that as soon as they fell into the hands of the Bolshevists they were every one of them shot.

We waited and waited; getting more and more bored; and at last Sloan and I got out and paid a visit to the station commandant, one of those visits of which we were to make so many more at almost every junction we were to come to.

This officer was an amiable enough young man, but very discouraging to travellers in a hurry. He said:

"There are no engines, and no trains to speak of. We can't in any case guarantee your getting beyond the Drav. There is a long wooden bridge there, and I expect you will have to walk across, and chance finding transport on the other side. All our trains are stolen, as soon as they cross the Drav, by the Jugoslavs or advancing Italians. They steal everything, for that matter—arms, ammunition, supplies, or anything that passes through that part of the country. Jugoslavia

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has proclaimed itself independent, and is showing its independence by indiscriminate thieving."

We had brought on the train with us a chest of tea with which to refresh ourselves *en route*. In including it in our baggage, we had also had another object in view; and now I went outside the door and asked one of the prisoners who was standing by to go and get a paper-bagful of it from our store. Tea was a thing the Austrians were very fond of, and I knew it had long been a mere tradition with them. When he had brought it, I returned to the Commandant, and after a little more talk, I said:

"How are you getting on for such things as tea, in Austria, just now?"

He laughed sardonically. "Tea!" he exclaimed. "There is no such thing in the country. It is impossible to get it."

"Not impossible for British officers," said I. "I have a packet of it here. If you would care to take it home to your wife, it will give us great pleasure."

After this we got on swimmingly; and we left him, so to speak, with an engine in our pockets.

An actual engine was quickly tacked on to our train, and we puffed off.

The following morning found us very haltingly trying to climb the Semmering Pass. In this region we began to see broken-down engines cumbering the sidings. We annexed one of the less decrepit, but even with that help we came to a standstill. I went along with a tin of Liebig to try to cheer up the driver, who, we feared, might abandon us altogether.

"All my washers are made of cardboard instead of

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leather," he complained. "I have to renew them *jede* minute."

"Can't you get hold of another engine?" I asked. "These two will never get us up, will they?"

"No," he said dejectedly; "these two won't."

After some persuasion he went off to a signal-box, and I suppose sent a wire down the line. At all events another engine presently turned up, and with great difficulty the three just managed to get us over the Pass.

Once over the crest we began to meet trains going the other way; long trains full of soldiers; the defeated, retreating army.

Full, they decidedly were. Consisting, as they did, of those cattle trucks one sees on the Continent on which are painted, even in peace time, the number of men and horses they are supposed to hold, they were packed as close as the men could stand; and they stood like sardines in a tin. There were men all over the roofs as well. Some of them had lighted little fires there, with wooden screens propped in front of them to keep off the wind. There were men on the foot-boards, sitting side by side in tightly compressed rows, their feet hanging down over the line. Even the buffers had their passengers, at least one man to every buffer; and sometimes planks were stretched across so as to carry more. They were a white and worn-out-looking crowd; thin and hungry-looking, poor wretches. The Semmering Pass is one long sequence of low tunnels; at each tunnel some of the men on the roofs were swept off.

On we went down the southern slope of the Pass till some time that day we came to a large station, Graz,

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where we stopped, and our train subsided altogether for some hours. The station was full of soldiers of every imaginable description and rank. Every race that had lately formed part of the Austrian Empire was well represented, and the place was absolutely packed with them.

To my relief they were almost friendly towards us; their attitude being on the whole one of intense interest, as if they would say: "Here you are. You have conquered us. What are you now going to do with us?"

I had all this time been in a good deal of anxiety as to what might not at any moment happen to us if we had the ill luck to come up against a row of any sort. A hundred Englishmen without a weapon of the smallest kind between them seemed rather a hopeless collection in the midst of these armies of Austrians, all fully armed, in a country where law and order were at a discount. We had no escort; no one with us to assist us with as much as a word if we got among an antagonistic lot. If we had had one Austrian officer even, it would have made all the difference. As it was, I was very glad to find that apparently the strongest sentiment we aroused in our recent enemies was curiosity.

As I stood on the platform, men kept coming up to me and asking questions as to the likelihood of England's sending food into the country, and they wanted to know what would be our general attitude towards Austria and the new independent States now that the Armistice was concluded. One engine driver stayed a long time questioning me more intelligently than the rest. In the end I found myself not only occupying the

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platform, but delivering a speech from it to an audience that hung upon my words, odd and halting words though they were. I told them that England had no ill feeling against Austria, and I dwelt a good deal on the iniquities of Germany, explaining how the fact that they had been tied to that nation's heels had led them into most of their troubles. I urged them, in the event of the Allies wishing to pass through Austria, an idea which was then in the air, not to throw any difficulties in our way; and in any case not to have anything more to do with Kaiser Wilhelm. In sum, I told them that if they were good boys from the Entente point of view, they would find us friendly, and all would be well with them.

As the meeting dispersed, well satisfied, I saw a Russian private run up to one of the British officers, named Brown, and shake him warmly by the hand. Brown seemed no less delighted, and the two fell into an animated conversation, carried on on one side in English, on the other in Russian.

"Brown," I asked afterwards, "who is your Russky friend?"

"That," he said, "is a man who was a stretcher-bearer on the Italian front where I was taken. He helped me off the field, and was jolly good to me."

A moment later I saw one of our flying officers, Forder by name, meet an acquaintance in the person of the Austrian pilot who had shot him down. They seemed quite pleased to see each other.

At length our train rumbled off, and presently we crossed the Drav into Jugoslavia, in spite of all the gloomy prophecies of the Station Commandant at Leobersdorf. The truth was that the railway company

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on its own initiative had decided to maintain the service till the evacuation of the Austrian troops was finished.

As we left Marburg we heard shots, and while we were crossing the bridge over the Drav and approaching the station beyond, there was quite sharp firing.

"What is up?" I asked a porter.

"It's those *verdammte* Jugoslavs," he replied. "They are stealing all our Army automobiles, and racing them across the frontier."

The line now took us through very pretty, warm-looking country, with blue rivers racing down the valleys; through these we wound for long hours till on the evening of the second day we reached Laibach, which I knew to be the newly proclaimed capital of Jugoslavia.

Here we were run into the midst of a wilderness of lines and sidings. The train stopped on one of the midmost of them. Our engine uncoupled itself and departed from us. We were left derelict and surrounded by a sea of stationary rolling stock.

Trains packed with soldiers stood all round us; every siding was covered with them. The station platform was equally full, and one way and another there must have been perhaps thirty thousand troops in it all the time we were there. A great air of confusion prevailed. One of the first things we noticed was that a whole string of railway trucks was on fire and burning merrily, no one making much attempt to put them out.

As soon as we were sure that our engine had irretrievably faded away, Sloan and I, leaving strict injunctions that no one else was to wander from the

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train, got out and threaded our way to the Station Commandant's office.

Here we found three young Jugoslavs looking very distraught and wearing on their caps a button that to us was both new and strange. We at once explained our presence, and asked for an engine to take us on.

"Quite impossible," was the reply, which by this time seemed to lack originality. "You don't appear to understand the position," the Commandant went on. "We have just taken over a new country. We have just taken over the station. Nothing is organized; and besides that, the Italians, in the most unwarrantable manner, are advancing from Trieste into our territory. They haven't the smallest excuse and are behaving in an altogether scandalous fashion, seizing our trains, and going on as if the Armistice didn't exist at all. You can see that we have other things to think of than engines for you."

The speaker was evidently very much fussed, and did not impress me as likely to be efficient. However, we were used to objections, and not easily to be discouraged. We persisted, and at last obtained from the Commandant a half-hearted promise to wire down the line and see if an engine could be produced from somewhere.

"Come back in an hour," he said, "and we will see if anything can be done."

As he was speaking, the door was thrown open and in walked a Serbian Colonel followed by a younger officer and two or three orderlies.

Very smart he looked as he came swaggering in, dressed in a beautiful new uniform, spick and span

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from head to foot, the greatest possible contrast to anything we had lately set eyes upon.

Here was a very different type of soldier from the crowd that thronged the station and the individuals in command of it. He was effusively welcomed by the Jugoslavs.

"Have you any revolvers?" he asked them at once.

"Plenty," the Station Commandant answered. He turned as he spoke and opened a cupboard that was probably used to contain waybills in ordinary times. It was stuffed with arms and ammunition.

The Serb's face lit up with delight as his eyes fell on the weapons. He seized a revolver for himself, and was dealing out others to his companions as we left the room.

When we went back, we found our train-load talking to another train full of Serbs which had drawn up alongside.

"Who are these?" we asked; and were told that they were liberated prisoners like ourselves.

"What are you doing here?" I inquired of one of them through the window.

"We are taking over our new territory," he replied proudly.

They were all very smart in new uniforms, which they said they had been sent by England while they were in prison; and they were very grateful and very friendly. Soon the Colonel, whom we had seen, came back. He had evidently discovered all sorts of things besides revolvers, for orders were quickly given, and the whole trainload descended and set to work under what was undoubtedly first-class leadership, to take charge of the station of Laibach and all appertaining

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thereto. In no time they had posted sentries; put machine guns in positions from which they could command the railway track; sent a squad to put out the blazing trucks (and had put them out); asserted their authority among the heterogeneous units that crowded the station, and generally put the whole place in a state of defence.

It was a wonderful display of capacity and efficiency; and it did me good to watch the way in which this bare hundred or so of men just out of prison established discipline and order where there had been nothing but chaos, and completely took the lead in a mixed gathering of 30,000 soldiers. Their own discipline left nothing to be wished for. I noticed a sentry being posted by an officer, and it was easy to see that the man was listening to his orders with his whole soul.

At long last we got an engine and went off again. As far as I could see there was no reason why we should not have had one from the beginning. Slowly we proceeded south, stopping continually at wayside stations where we waited interminably—twenty minutes or so at each. When I got down to see what I could find out, someone invariably rushed up to me and said:

"The Italians are advancing into our country in the most monstrous way. Will you tell your Government about it as soon as you get back? Promise to explain that they are simply stealing our land from us."

Poor country! I could, of course, do nothing for it. The truth was that the moment the Austrian Armistice was declared, a general scramble for land began at all the Austrian borders.

I talked a good deal to the guard of the train, who

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was a Czech. Like most Czechs he looked more like a groom, this being perhaps because they are more clean-shaven than most of the denizens of Eastern Europe, who on an average run rather copiously to Beaverism. He told me that he was going to throw up his work on the railway in a few days and return home.

"There is a lot to be done there," he said. "We expect to have some fighting, and have no idea of the Germans finding us unprepared. In fact, we have already got a line of trenches dug above Nachod, between Bohemia and Germany."

I thought this very interesting, if true, as I have no reason to doubt it was; since the trenches he spoke of must have been dug before the Armistice, while Germany and Austria were allies, and the Czechs nominally were fighting on Germany's side.

After travelling all night we reached Trieste in the early hours of the morning, without meeting a single Italian, in spite of the assurances we had received at Laibach that they had already advanced as far as St. Peter.

Great was our delight at arriving, and greater still the disillusionment we encountered as soon as we tumbled out of the train.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AND REACH ORDER

At the hour of 5 a.m. it was possibly not surprising that we should not find the Italian Generalissimo waiting with the red carpet down on the platform to

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welcome us. But, if we did not expect manifestations in our honour, we did rather expect to see some signs that the Allies had reached the town and were prepared to administer it in the interests of their friends. The station was nearly empty; the only people we saw were some released prisoners like ourselves, recently arrived and strolling aimlessly about looking pretty miserable. We talked to some of them. There were no English, but a goodly mixture of many nationalities; all were in a half-starving condition and their clothes were hanging in rags.

It was too early to find any official up, so Sloan and I went to an hotel and asked for rooms. The hotel people said, looking at us doubtfully, that they had a few rooms, but they added that they had visitors already at the hotel.

"Well," said we, "we'll take what you have," and, returning to the station, we fetched the rest of the party.

The doubtful looks with which I had been greeted changed to something a good deal more positive at the irruption of some hundred of us, as we passed into the hotel and dumped our baggage in the hall. However, we had all the Red Cross money in our pockets, and I flourished it in the face of the manager till he quieted down a bit. The chief difficulty was in getting the orderlies admitted.

When we had in this way gained a temporary billet, Sloan and I started out to find the Italian Headquarters.

As we walked through the streets we found the town strangely empty. On either side large warehouses stood silent and apparently devoid of life.

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Nearly all the inhabitants must have fled at the approach of the Italians.

Arrived at Headquarters, we penetrated into the presence of a high personage, who received us, outwardly, quite affably. But when I began to suggest that we hoped for help to return to our units, expressions of regret were all he had to offer.

"Can't you let us have some food?" I asked.

"I have no food to give you."

"Can you give us transport, sir?"

"I fear not."

"How did you get here, sir?" I inquired.

"Oh, we came by automobile," was the reply, "but the routes are choked now by the army. There is no way back except by sea, and that is impossible. The Adriatic is sown with mine-fields. It is very dangerous for any but vessels drawing the smallest amount of water to venture on it."

"Well, sir, can't you give us some billets?"

"No, I have no billets available."

Visions of the empty houses we had passed on our way from the hotel rose before my eyes; but all in vain did I struggle to get something out of him.

In the end the only thing he would say was that a small ship would be leaving some time that day, and that he would arrange that she should take us over to Venice.

He referred us to a Marine office; and with this slight encouragement we departed down to the wharves.

When we reached them, there was no sign of the ship; the people in the office could tell us nothing and had received no orders about us. We were looking

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about us blankly when we saw two Italian naval officers walk on to the quay.

They had a genial, sea-faring look about them, and I nudged my companion and murmured in his ear, "Come on, let's try these two."

We went up to them, and explained who we were and the plight we were in.

"Couldn't you possibly take us on your ships?" we begged.

"I am starting back on my destroyer in three-quarters of an hour," one of them said. "If you like, I can take six of you. I'm afraid I can't take all."

"Thank you very much," we said, and thereupon we hurried back to the hotel to tell our news and to select the lucky six.

Great was the dismay of those who were to be left behind.

Like the Walrus, with sobs and tears we sorted out six of the largest size. Some of the forsaken, however, had no idea of submitting to their fate without an effort. Snatching up their packs they rushed on ahead of us down to the wharf, and managed to get aboard the destroyer.

When the Captain came aboard he found about twenty guests, counting both the invited and the uninvited, crouching in various corners of the boat, and trying to look as much as possible like spare tackle or any part of the ship's gear.

He gazed around him forbiddingly for an instant; then a grin spread over his face, and he evidently changed his mind about ordering us ashore.

The anchor was got up and off we went, even the worst sailors among the party were perfectly happy as

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the sea was a dead calm; though the remarks of the officer at Headquarters on the subject of the abundance of mines between Trieste and Venice stuck unpleasantly in one's mind, the only small fly in our ointment.

But though we did not know it, our troubles were by no means over.

It was getting late when we reached Venice; dusk was falling and lamps already alight here and there. Their reflections were scattered very beautifully upon the water, but the illumination was scarcely brilliant enough to show us very distinctly the lie of the land. As we drew near a quay of some kind, shouts were exchanged between our destroyer and a man with a megaphone ashore. We could not make out what they were saying, but the boat turned round and steamed back towards the open sea. Before long, however, she stopped beside an island, where, as it was now quite dark, all we could discern was a rough wooden landing-stage.

We were invited to step ashore, and lost no time in doing so. Barely were we and our baggage dumped on land than the ship moved away; and turning to walk off the landing-stage, we found ourselves, after taking two or three steps forward, walking slap into barbed wire, and a carabinier facing us from behind a rifle.

It was too much!

After years of prison camps, had we left them at last only to land in another wire cage like all the others? Was it for this that we had toiled and moiled, that we had abased ourselves before station Commandants, and struggled to survive the intolerable æons of prison time?

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An Italian Adjutant advanced towards us through the misty night. He arrived at an unpropitious moment. We lifted up our voices and cursed him comprehensively in every language we could muster; we cursed him in chorus with a unanimity that would have gladdened the heart of a theatrical manager. When at length we had conveyed to him a faint suggestion of our feelings, we asked where we were.

"On the quarantine island," he replied.

"What on earth are we quarantined for?"

"All prisoners are being quarantined before returning."

"What do you mean by putting us in a barbed-wire cage?"

"Why are we being treated as if we were your prisoners?"

"How shall we get anything to eat?"

Questions rained on him.

His answers were unsatisfactory in the extreme. The island, as we soon discovered, was a mass of filth, compared to which all our previous lodging places had been clean and luxurious. There was a dirty house, where in the end we were forced to sleep. There, all but one of us passed an uneasy night. The exception, a ship's officer, was in such a rage that nothing would induce him to lie down beneath an Italian roof, and he spent the entire night in striding up and down outside the hut, voicing to the darkness his opinion of Italian soldiers and sailors, their hospitality, ways, manners and customs; and consigning them and everything connected with them to everlasting perdition.

As early as possible next morning we were engaged in trying to telephone to the British Consul, with the

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net result that Italian telephones were added to our catalogue of things execrable; but with that result only.

Fuming with annoyance, I was standing with Murray at the edge of the water when suddenly a small boat hove in sight, appearing from round a corner of the island, and propelled by a little boy aged about nine years. Immediately we assailed him with all manner of blandishments and cajoling signs, till soon we prevailed on him to manœuvre the boat within reach.

With one bound we sprang in and seated ourselves in it.

"Now," said I, "Avanti! Row as hard as you can!"

But our hopes were dashed by the small boatman, who at once burst into loud cries and yells, and began to bellow at the top of his voice.

Such a terrific outcry did he raise that all the carabinieri on the island were upon us in a moment, and we were ignominiously forced out of the boat.

Meanwhile, the two or three Frenchmen in our party had been having luck with the telephone. They had managed to get on to a French aerodrome near Venice; and after a short time a flying officer from this station arrived in a steam launch with authority to take them off.

"Couldn't you take us too?" said we; and the Airman very obligingly tackled the Italian Adjutant on the question, and finally persuaded him to let Sloan and me accompany him for a few hours, by giving his parole that he would send us back in the afternoon.

Accordingly we steamed away to Venice, and a

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landing-stage where the French flyer's beautiful big motor was waiting. He made us all get in and took us off to lunch at his club billet. There we had a delicious meal which included champagne and all sorts of delicacies—the first real meal any of us had tasted since we left England.

After that he took us in his car to the door of the British Consulate, and left us there, two very grateful Englishmen. I must say I have always felt an increased affection for the French since that day.

As we were thanking him and saying good-bye, the horrid prospect of returning shortly to the quarantine island came upon me with fresh disgust.

"By the by," I said, "what about your parole to send us back to the island?"

"Oh, that," he said with a laugh, "pour ça, je m'en fiche!"

He rolled away, and we returned to the Consulate behind us.

We went up a flight of broad wooden stairs and came to a door bearing the inscription we sought. I rang the bell.

After some time it was opened by a dismal-looking woman, who appeared to be English.

"Can we see the Consul?"

"He is ill; you can't see him."

"We must see him. It is most important. What's the matter with him?"

"He is in bed with influenza. He can't possibly see you."

"Influenza or no influenza, he must see us. We represent one hundred British officers and men just out of an Austrian prison, and at present totally

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stranded in Italian hands. Please go up and tell him."

The woman tried to shut the door, but I had taken the precaution of putting my foot inside. Very reluctantly she departed on our errand, and soon returned to repeat that the Consul was very sorry that he was unable to receive us.

We were not to be got rid of so easily, and after prolonged argument and exhortations we sent her to him again, with the result that a pallid figure in a dressing-gown made its appearance and tried to persuade us in person that we could have nothing done for us that day. With great difficulty we managed to get him to send a wire to British Headquarters on our behalf.

The effect was immediate. In a very short time authority for our release and orders for our disposal arrived; but before they did so, our friends whom we had left in quarantine also turned up, having been allowed to leave—why, they themselves had no idea. I think it must have been that the Adjutant could stand them no longer.

Our orders were to go to Padua; in a few hours we arrived, and our difficulties came suddenly and dramatically to an end. The British had their own R.T.O. at Padua. He met us when we got there, to our great comfort and pleasure. He had motors at the station to meet us; in them we were driven off to a monastery or convent on the hills, about twelve kilometres away, which was the British Reinforcement camp.

It was a beautiful situation, with the foothills of the Alps on one side and vineyards and maize fields on the other. The religious Order to whom it belonged had

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been turned out, some years before, but two or three monks remained as caretakers. The convent was a huge rectangular building containing several beautiful arcaded courtyards and around them were the various schools for officers and lodgings for those going through them, and for the picked N.C.O.s who acted as instructors.

It was intensely interesting to people like us, who were by then years behindhand in regard to the newest appliances of war, to hear and see all the latest developments; and, of course, to hear about the Piave battle and many matters regarding the Italian Front, which have never, even now, been generally made known.

Everyone was very nice to us and welcomed us very kindly; the N.C.O.s getting up a special concert for our entertainment; and we enjoyed our stay more than anyone who has not spent years in German prisons can probably realize. The contrast between the sordid surroundings we had languished in for so long and this spotless retreat in the midst of classic beauty, where all around us was so specklessly clean and spick and span, and everything seemed to be run by clockwork, was so great as to make us feel that we had wakened from a nightmare sleep, to find ourselves in fairyland.

The ancient beauty and dignity of architecture with which we found ourselves surrounded after the tin huts we were used to, did a great deal to strengthen this impression. I remember that one day Dobbs and I persuaded one of the monks to unlock the library for our benefit. It was a long and large room full of bookshelves containing old volumes of theology and

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monkish lore. On the floor was lying the body of a little dead owl that had somehow strayed into the room. I fancied that it must be the little owl of Minerva.

Sometimes I think that if we brought no other loot away with us from the territories of our enemies, we did perhaps bring out a little more wisdom than we had taken in to them.

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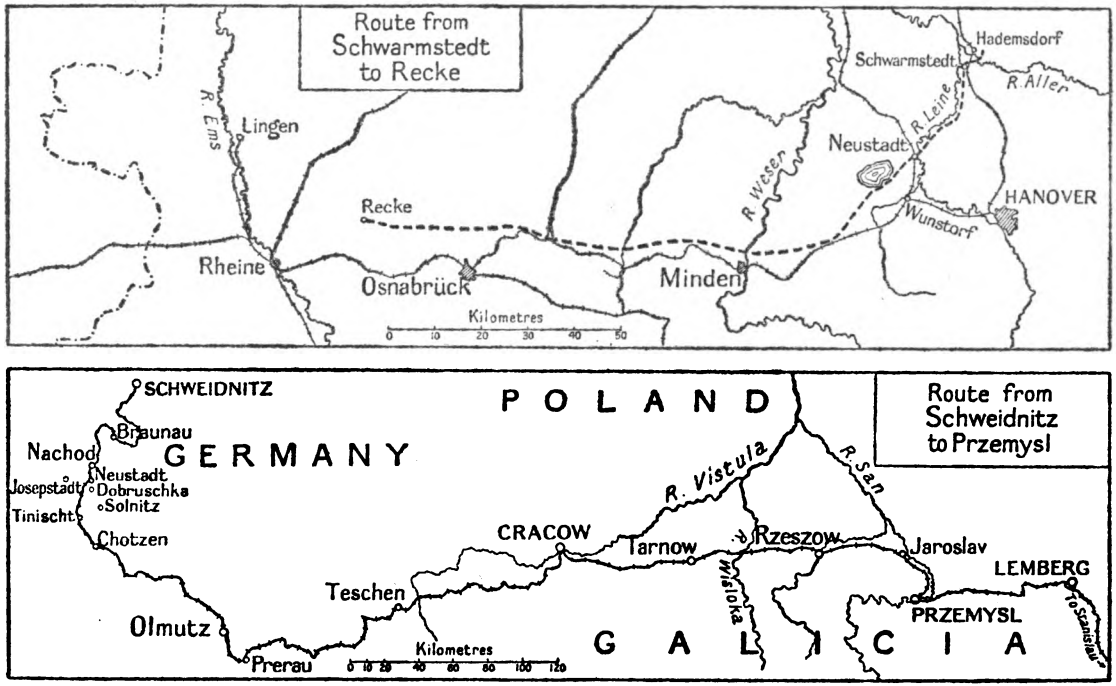

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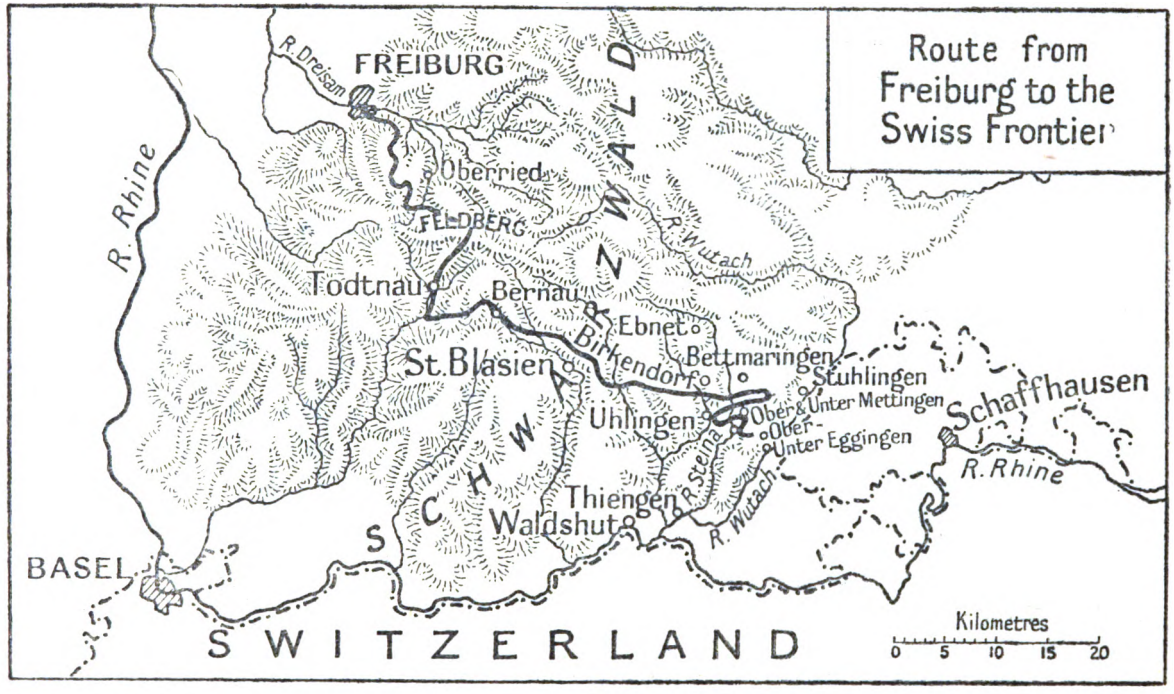

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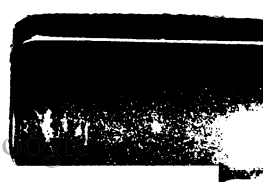

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